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MEMOIRS OF A CLUBMAN

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

The Faithful Fool
Uncle Jeremy
Pilgrims of Circumstance
A Rubber Princess
A Gentle Despot
The Throw Back
Lady Mary's Money
The Greater Gain
A Puller of Strings
The Girl Who Got Out
The Hut by the River
A Game of Hearts
The Herb of Healing
The Duke's Twins
Within the Gates
The Love that Lasts
The "Second-Sighter's" Daughter
Varick's Legacy
"Dickie Dilver"
The Belle of Santiago
A Lady of Spain
The Vision of Balmaine
This Son of Adam
Diana of Dreams
The King of Four Corners
A Simple Savage
The Slaves of Allah
The Trickster
Flowers of Fire
A Woman's Way
Galahad's Garden
Fanuela
Which Woman?
Peggy the Pilgrim
The Belles of Vaudroy
The Only World
The Devil's Due
The Marble City
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The Ladies of the Manor
The Shutters of Silence (39th edition)
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The Person in the House
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Settled out of Court
Fortune's Footballs
The Cattle Man
"Old Man's" Marriage
Tuxter's Little Maid
His Lordship and Others
The Judge of Four Corners
Gascoigne's "Ghost"
The Dance at Four Corners
Tomalyn's Quest

Photo by Walter Pennington

Geo. B. Burgin.

Memoirs of a Clubman

BY

G. B. BURGIN

"Nothing *exterminate*,
Nor set down aught in malice."
—SHAKESPEARE ADAPTED.

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TO

MISS A. LLOYD-EVANS

AND

ALDERMAN J. LLOYD-EVANS

AS A REMINDER OF THE PLEASANT LITERARY CHATS WE HAVE HAD TOGETHER IN OUR JOURNALISTIC WANDERINGS

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PROLOGUE

It has often occurred to me that from the very force of their genius, most of the world's successful geniuses become rather uninteresting. They leap to the front, and stay there. Then comes the adulation of the world and their genius dies. By taking it for granted, they kill it. If they only realised the fact (they seldom do), they were so much more interesting when they were nobodies, when they were rather looked down upon by their fellow-creatures. In the fulness of time they die, and someone rakes together all the things which ever happened to them, all the formal letters accepting dinner invitations, and, worst of all, gives a minute account of certain problematically respectable but indubitably dull people who were unfortunate enough to be either their ancestors or their family connections. I once had the honour of being invited by a Ladies' Club to meet the guest of the afternoon. I never knew her name, for all that I could gather about her was that she was the famous Mr. Blank's mother-in-law. Mr. Blank is still prominently before the public, but he has had so many mothers-in-law that I remain in doubt as to which of them I met. He is in the prime of life, however, and—one never knows—I may yet have the felicity of meeting some more of them. The one I did meet was certainly more interesting than Mr. Blank, though she admitted to me that she was very much frightened and had not known of the reflected honours in store for her.

Why write these reminiscences? Why inflict my own experiences on a long-suffering public? Briefly, the reason is this: I have a profound detestation of the man who makes "copy" out of a friend directly the breath leaves his body, who, instead of sorrowfully taking that dead friend's hand

when he sets out on his last sad journey, the journey which we must all make alone, sits down and cudgels his brains for "anecdotes" about him. It is base, it is brutal to do this, and reflects discredit on the dead man that he should have had such a friend. But men at my Club come up to me and say: "You've been through the mill, met lots of interesting people, travelled in many lands. Go home and scribble us something about them and yourself, and how you began to write novels." When I tell them, however, that I have generally found the smaller people nicer than the bigger ones, they reflect: "Very well. Let's have the smaller ones too. No one ever thinks it worth while to write about the smaller ones. Then we'll decide whether there's anything in it."

"But the smaller ones won't like being called the smaller ones."

"Then they must lump it; and if you mix up big and little together, the little ones won't be any the wiser."

The phrase lacks elegance, but that is the way they put it.

Frankly, I do not know whether there is anything in it. I only hope so. And, at the risk of being thought a confirmed egotist, I am going to give you a little sketch of a few wanderings in a little life and its little happenings. If I get "slated" as I probably shall, you will enjoy reading the "slatings"; if my good friends the critics (on the whole they have been very kind to me, although many of them, I regret to say, are not obsessed by the amount of talent which I am supposed to possess) "let me down lightly," I shall be grateful, because what I want to do is to tell how the most unlikely person drifts into "writing" (drifts into "literature" is too pretentious) in some sort of inscrutably predestined way with which he has nothing whatever to do, and is gradually more or less fitted for his work. "Why," I once asked an elderly relative, "did this curse of writing descend upon me when I have nine brothers and sisters who ought to have shared it but did not? I'm not aware that in any other incarnation I did something to justify so severe a punishment."

She thought for a moment, and I anxiously awaited the outcome of her thoughts.

"None of my family ever wrote things?"

"Oh yes, they did. Your sainted grandmamma, who is now in heaven, wrote verses. That must be it."

I shook my fist at the imaginary form of my "sainted grandmamma."

"Oh, if I could only see her in heaven to tell her what I think of her!"

My elderly relative bridled indignantly. "My dear boy" (this to a bald-headed man of some fifty winters), "if you speak in so disrespectful a way of your sainted grandmamma, who is now in heaven, you will never—no, never—have the opportunity of meeting her there."

Gentle reader—although I do not know how long your "gentleness" will survive this infliction—please take it for granted that I am one of my own heroes, an imaginary being. If you will concede this to me when the egotistic note recurs too frequently, you will see that it would be impossible to tell the story in any other way. My friend Mr. Jerome K. Jerome once wrote a book in which he "poked fun" at stage conventions. Among other things he wanted to know, when the hero of a play made his appearance, why he always sat on the drawing-room table. In real life, Jerome contended, a man with any pretensions to a knowledge of the conventionalities does not enter his hostess's drawing-room and sit on the table. Why should he do it on the stage, which is supposed to mirror the habits of real people? Then he wrote a play, and the first thing his hero did was to sit on the drawing-room table. And that hero, "never flitting, still is sitting," in the stage directions, on that drawing-room table. "Paregorically speaking," I know I shall sit on the drawing-room table, and that someone is sure to come and push me off again.

GEO. B. BURGIN.

MEMOIRS OF A CLUBMAN

CHAPTER I

I AM BORN

One must be born somewhere, so, early in January, 1856, I selected Croydon as a quiet unobtrusive place in which to make my first acquaintance with the world. Shortly after I arrived at the house honoured by my preference, the indignant landlord, with some prescient knowledge of what I was going to be, pulled it down in order that the outrage might not be repeated, and, when I was old enough to travel, I took my parents to live with me at New Barnet.

At New Barnet I met Bailey, who, although he did not know it, and in all probability never will know it, was responsible for shaping my career. We journeyed together twice a day up Barnet Hill to school. Then Bailey fell into evil ways and was always late.

"How do you account for your unpunctuality, Bailey?" the headmaster ominously inquired as he fingered a particularly pliable cane. "Three times this week I have had occasion to remonstrate with you about your procrastinating habits. What have you to say for yourself?"

Chubby-faced Bailey frowned, his great heart rose in rebellion against imminent injustice. "They can't get my breakfast ready in time, sir, and without my breakfast I won't hurry up Barnet Hill for man or devil."

The headmaster paused and the cane dropped from his unnerved fingers. Bailey the lion-hearted picked up his old

enemy, an enemy by whom too oft of late he had been smitten, not on the right cheek but elsewhere, and politely returned it to our choleric pedagogue.

"That's all I've got to say, sir," he declared, and began to unbutton.

The headmaster stayed him with a majestic gesture. "There is something in what you say, Bailey, although you present your views with an unbecoming irreverence. I will write to your parents and ask them to see to your breakfast."

When he afterwards met me in the playground, I congratulated Bailey on his pluck and we swore eternal friendship by crossing fingers and, with the aid of a pin, mingling our blood. We bound ourselves by a solemn oath that the one who had the first chance of seeing foreign climes should take the other with him. When we reached "foreign climes" we were to write books. Which reminds me of the nervous young girl who had written a couple of novels and was taken in to dinner by no less a person than Alfred, Lord Tennyson. "Well, my dear, what do you do for a living?" gruffly asked the great man. The girl was so embarrassed by this unexpected inquiry that she faltered out, "I bite rooks."

Bailey and I agreed to "bite rooks" between us. But his parents moved away from New Barnet, and Bailey moved with them. He may be a great and good man, or a poor and a bad one, but I shall not know which, for from the day of our sad farewell I have never heard from him, never set eyes on him, never expect to meet him again in this world. Still, as the advertisement says, "If this should meet the eye" of Bailey, perhaps he will come forward and condone my involuntary breaking of our compact.

Bereft of Bailey, sorrowful and forlorn, I wandered over Rowley Green near Arkley village one day and was passing

a little whitewashed cottage. In the sandy space before the cottage door half a dozen hens sunned themselves, and by the side of the door stood an old barrel.

Idly wondering why this disfiguring barrel was there, I approached the door to beg for a drink of water. There was a sudden rush, a fierce snarl from the barrel, and the next moment I careered wildly among the hens, dragging the barrel with me. To the barrel was attached a chain, to the chain a big Airedale, and to the back of my trousers the Airedale hung on like grim death.

The weight of the barrel gradually told on the dog and he relaxed his grip. A dwarf rushed out of the cottage followed by an old woman in a print gown.

The dwarf was one Jerry Oldenshaw, the old woman was his mother. Whilst Jerry apologised, the old woman insisted on disrobing my nether limbs in order to examine "if the skin's broken." "If it isn't," she said, "you've no legal remedy. Besides, he's a right to one bite."

Though the skin was not broken, by reason of my unheroic flight, my heart was. But for my dawning manhood, I could have wept.

Jerry comforted me, and we had tea together in his sitting-room, which was exactly like the cabin of a ship, for his father had been a ship captain. Whilst I revelled in the curios it contained, curios brought from the ends of the earth, we became friends. Jerry wrote little articles about the birds on the common, and the weasels and stoats and rabbits; in short, anything he could see from his cabin window. He wanted to be a great man and write a great book. Then some beautiful girl might overlook his physical deformity and—love him.

At the age of fourteen I could not greatly sympathise

with the love part of his story. Jerry was eighteen, and I spent all my spare time with him. When he was not writing articles he sketched out his great book, but, alas! the Princess who was to heal him of his bodily pain and infirmities never came, the book was never finished, for Jerry died. Before he died, he extracted a promise from me. I was to become an author, never to think of filthy lucre but to write for humanity's sake. Jerry consorted a great deal with the gipsies on the Common, and, in some mysterious way born of suffering, had acquired an insight into the future. "You will travel," he said. "You will travel into strange lands and meet with many things. Store them in your heart and make books." At that time, it seemed to me the summit of human felicity to be able to write books. Sometimes the gods answer our prayers in order to punish us for having made them.

When eighteen, I was still intent on writing books. Providence smiled on me. I won a copy of Goldsmith's "Deserted Village" in an alleged literary competition. My knowledge of the price of books now leads me to believe that it was worth about three-and-six. Then, it was priceless, although, counting the cost of postages for other competitions wherein I ignominiously failed to win anything, I must have been a good deal out of pocket. Still, I won "The Deserted Village." Think of it. Won it off my own bat, with no influence, no one to put in a word for me at court. The great and good editor who rewarded—I still think inadequately rewarded—me for my poem, evidently said to himself, as Browning once wrote to F. B. Doveton regarding an unsolicited copy of Doveton's poems: "I have never read anything like it." "That's high praise coming from such a man as Browning," quoth poor Doveton. Andrew Lang also

wrote to him : " I always use copies of books sent to me by authors whom I have not the honour of knowing, to line the backs of my bookcases." The base, despicable, crawling worms who called themselves editors said nasty things about my efforts in other competitions. Never mind. Let us leave

" Those noteless blots on a remember'd name "

to their own infamy.

" Well," rather hopelessly inquired my father one evening, " isn't it about time that you did something to justify your existence ? Any ideas on the subject ? "

" I want to write books."

" What about ? "

It had not occurred to me.

My father arose in wrath. " You've seen nothing, know nothing, learned nothing of the great world. What justification have you for wanting to write books ? "

" I don't know, but I *want* to write books," I doggedly repeated.

My father reflected. " Sure there's nothing else you can do ? "

" There isn't anything else, there can't be anything else. I'm conscious of something within me."

" If you're going to retain that consciousness of something within you and not starve, you must see the world a little before you begin. Every young cub who wants to write books also wants to instruct the world. Why do you think you can instruct the world ? "

" There are many things in it of which I don't approve, and—— "

" Rubbish ! There's only one way out of it. If you want

to instruct the world, you must see the world. So far it has got on very well without being instructed by you.

'Home-keeping youths have ever homely wits.'

I'll pay your expenses among our Canadian friends for a year and give you a chance. If you can't find anything there to write about, you'll never find anything anywhere else."

I was overwhelmed with gratitude. Canada! The land of Accanada! It was more inviting than Heaven. Besides, I could return from Canada if I did not like it, whereas there was no returning from Heaven if it did not agree with me.

My father guessed my thoughts. "Don't be profane. You can start next week. I'll see to your outfit. After all, it's a great thing to be young and dream dreams. I'll give you a hundred pounds and a year in which to 'make good.'"

A week later I started for Canada (second class: I came back steerage) in one of the Allan Line steamers, a respectable old tub which had a supreme contempt for the Atlantic and refused to be hurried on any pretext whatever.

But oh, that heavenly voyage; the delight of it; the kindness of the gentleman who wanted to teach me how to play poker and suggested five-dollar stakes a game; the more disinterested kindness of the steward who nursed me through sea-sickness; the pretty girls who were going out to their brothers in the great North-West; the concert with which we wound up before reaching Quebec; the first sight of its frowning citadel with its immortal associations. I was Galahad going to flesh my maiden quill, Don Quixote ready to tilt at windmills or anything else that got in my way. In short, my father

had most accurately summed up my qualifications for instructing the world. Perhaps he had been a little censorious ; but still one must allow for a parent's inability to see things right under his nose.

I landed at Quebec.

" I have often thought, " once wrote that sweetest of all humorists, my friend W. L. Alden, " what a blessing it would have been if when the Pilgrim Fathers landed on Plymouth Rock, Plymouth Rock had landed on the Pilgrim Fathers." I should have been spared much toil and tribulation had Canada " landed " on me instead of my landing on Canada, although in that case I should never have stayed at a Trappist Monastery and written an unobtrusive little novel called " The Shutters of Silence." Apropos of this book, I once met a dear old lady who clasped me by the hand and warmly congratulated me on being the " gifted author of ' The Domes of Silence,' " the aforesaid " domes " being an ingenious invention which fitted on the legs of tables and chairs so that they could be moved more easily.

CHAPTER II

FOUR CORNERS

It was snowing heavily—Canadian snow, snow which fell in what a penny-a-liner calls "floceulent masses." The ferry boat made its last trip of the season between the C.P.R. station on the one side of the Ottawa River and the little semi-habitant village of Four Corners on the other. Great chunks of wood were heaved into its furnace to the tune of "Peter Piper picked a peck of pickled pepper" as we fussed over to the opposite shore and landed a cargo of three pigs and four barrels of flour. The captain steered, and the crew, a shock-headed youth of eighteen, dumped the cargo on the crazy old wooden wharf which ran out for half a mile into the river. In spite of the snow, the tin roofs of the Court House and the Catholic Church shone brightly. There was a square with elm-trees planted at irregular intervals, their gaunt, leafless branches already bent beneath the weight of falling snow. The Presbyterian church lacked a steeple. A stray dog howled mournfully in the middle of the main street until a piebald goat jumped along and gave him more than adequate reason for his melancholy. "It's a great little place," enthusiastically remarked the friend who had come to meet me. "What Four Corners doesn't know, the rest of the world doesn't miss." And I afterwards found that he had understated the truth.

As the spirited Canuck ponies danced up the wharf, I was

so cold that I forgot my high and mighty mission. We were driving on what seemed to me the wrong side of the road and I said so, but my friend was not alarmed. "Habitant fashion," he explained. "You don't think we're as far behind as the Old Country? I've taken rooms for you in the gaol. Uncle J. and Aunt Milly run the gaol between them. We'd have been glad to have you come to us, only your father said you were 'to be on your own.' You'll find lots of human nature in the gaol—mostly in striped pants, but still human nature. When you've settled down a bit, I'll take you to our two editors, Mr. Driffle and Colonel Draper. They've promised me to let you fool round in their offices and learn to set type if you want to. Now I'll introduce you to Aunt Milly and Uncle James. They're our prize couple. There may be better people in the world, but if so I haven't met 'em. There's Uncle James stroking his silver beard and waiting for you. So's Aunt Milly. She isn't stroking her beard, because she hasn't got one, but if she had one she'd stroke it just to keep Uncle J. in countenance. If Uncle J. wants you to go with him to the prayer meeting this evening, don't buck, but go."

We pulled up with a flourish, and I jumped straight down from the buggy into the hearts of Aunt Milly and Uncle J. Aunt Milly was thirty years younger than Uncle J. and still a very handsome woman, with glossy black hair and dark soft eyes. Her speech was that of a cultivated gentlewoman. "Come in and get warm," she said cordially. "You'll be frozen to death if you go about dressed like that in winter time. Your rooms are all ready for you, and this is your home as long as you choose to make it so."

"For sure," added Uncle J. "Dinner's ready. Sit down and eat."

And I *did* eat. Never shall I forget that meal of roast turkey and "punkin pie." We had tea with it, weak wishy-washy stuff, as I thought it, until Aunt Milly explained that it was the strongest green tea and that if I drank too much green tea I should die young. To this day, I never see a cranberry without remembering the cranberry sauce with the turkey. When I had eaten to repletion, Uncle J. fervently thanked the Lord for all His mercies, including my safe arrival, although it seemed to me that he was rather premature.

Aunt Milly insisted on my lying down in the gaol "parlour." The embrasures between the windows were four feet deep. A great stove with snake-like black pipes warmed the hall. On the left was a kitchen, and opening out from the kitchen a barred iron door through which came a strong smell of habitant tobacco. "It's against the regulations, but they like it, poor things," Uncle J. explained. "I can always get them to think more of their souls when they're smoking *le bon tabac*, especially if I buy it for them."

When I awoke, dusky shadows played upon the furniture of the cosy room. Aunt Milly sat knitting beside me, eager for news of the outer world, although there were piles of newspapers and magazines on the table at her elbow. "You'll find many very nice people here and a few nasty ones. I hope that you haven't brought any golf-clubs?" she asked with seeming irrelevance. "Or knickerbockers? We have rather a prejudice against young Englishmen with golf-clubs and knickerbockers."

Fortunately, I had not brought either golf-clubs or knickerbockers.

"And you haven't any walking-sticks?"

I had not any walking-sticks.

"Then I think we shall get along very nicely."

Outside, the snow caked against the windows, and through the open parlour door came the fragrance of crackling wood in the stove, the liberated spirit of what had once been a giant pine. Another more mundane fragrance mingled with the spirit of the pine—the fragrance of supper.

"You must make the best of what a travelled English governor-general once called our 'rude-plenty,'" smiled Aunt Milly as we adjourned to the dining-room and she heaped my plate with hot buckwheat cakes drowned in maple syrup.

"He *can* eat," said the admiring Uncle J. as I toyed with a further supply of buckwheat cakes. "When he's *done* eating and we've thanked the Lord for our food, I'll take him down to the prayer-meeting and introduce him to the minister."

"But he hasn't a fur coat," protested Aunt Milly. "He can't go out on such a night as this without a fur coat."

"He can have one of mine, the one I chop wood in," firmly replied Uncle J.

"Won't the Reverend John wait?" asked Aunt Milly. "It is such a bitter night."

"Mr. Mackonochie wants to welcome him."

Aunt Milly sighed resignedly. "Oh, very well. I'll hunt up a fur cap. Get back as soon as you can."

I was wrapped in the fur coat, the one Uncle J. "chopped wood in," my hands were protected by thick woollen gloves and the fur cap drawn down over my ears. Then, clinging to Uncle J., I set out through the storm, little knowing that it was through the minister's agency that I should first be introduced to English men of letters.

It was a quaint church built of grey granite. The original

builders had begun an ambitious steeple and, for want of funds, failed to finish it. The inside also exhibited an unfinished appearance, for the walls were whitewashed, no stained glass ornamented the snow-covered windows, and the thatched roof harboured hordes of wasps which, now that the stove was lighted for the first time, drowsily fell on the Elders' heads or crawled up their legs. The doctor's retriever, with a bone in his mouth, lay by the door. The Rev. John Mackonochie stood by the raised platform. At his side was a beautiful fair-haired, blue-eyed girl who played the wheezy old harmonium. Twenty or thirty people sat in the varnished high-backed pews, and the Sheriff, as if from force of habit, guarded the door. He was six feet two and was known as "Little John Donoch," because he had four brothers, all of them two or three inches taller than himself. A few oil lamps shed a dull light on the scene.

Until it came to Uncle J.'s turn to pray, the meeting was like most other prayer-meetings. The beautiful girl at the harmonium turned round to face him and I stared through my fingers at her charming face. I fancied that she glanced at me with eager curiosity. Curiosity changed to amazement, amazement to smiles, as Uncle James began his prayer. This was the prayer :

"Thou knowest, O Lord, that in Thy infinite goodness and mercy Thou hast directed the steps of our young friend into our midst. He is so very young, so unused to the world and all its sinfulness, that he is as one wandering through the darkness with no fixed purpose. He has it in his mind, O Lord, to write books, and it has not yet been given him to know what sort of books. Turn him, O Lord, we beseech Thee, from the thoughtless error of his ways and, in Thine own good time, teach him to do something useful."

That was all I remember of Uncle J.'s prayer. Fortunately for me, the rest of it concerned his neighbours. In his saintly simplicity he hit upon their failings right and left, and I considered that I had got off very lightly. Uncle J. evidently, although his wife did not, thought that all books save one were sinful things, the writers of them beings to be prayed for and led into the right path. He was amazed the next morning when I showed my hurt feelings. "But, my dear lad," he explained, "I had to put in a word for you to the dear Lord. He's busy with so much more important sinners that I was afraid you'd be overlooked."

The beautiful girl hastily turned round to her harmonium, and a few earnest, well-chosen words from the minister ended the proceedings. I was introduced to him and promptly invited to tea the next afternoon. The beautiful girl came up and I was introduced to her. I was pleased to see that her laughter had given way to unfeigned admiration. "You're going to write books," she softly breathed. "You're going to write books. How lovely! May I—may I help you?"

With delirious enthusiasm I said that she might, that she would make a delightful heroine for them; and many a time since she has done so, although camouflaged under different eyes and complexions.

She smiled more sweetly than before, her blue eyes gazed raptly into mine, and I was invited to tea at her father's house. Invitations to four other teas and a dinner followed from various members of the congregation, all on the strength of Uncle J.'s prayer. I saw nothing, felt nothing, heard nothing but the wonderful voice of the equally wonderful blue-eyed girl. When we got back to the gaol and I had been dug out of Uncle J.'s coat, I told Aunt Milly about her.

Aunt Milly smiled maternally. "Sheila Campbell will

teach you far more than you can teach her, my dear boy. Now go to bed. You must be worn out."

I went to bed, but not to sleep. Why was that blue-eyed girl so different from other girls? She wanted to help me to write books. Owing to youthful shyness, hitherto I had not bothered myself about girls. Still, if it were manifestly my duty to write books, I must know all about girls, at least all that it was seemly for a young man to know. There could be no doubt but that in the interests of my Art I ought to study the one girl of all girls, Sheila Campbell.

Sheila! What a lovely name! Sheila! Say it softly to yourself; it is like a prayer. Later, in the strictest confidence, she informed me that she did not like her surname because on the day when she first gladdened the world with her sweet presence, her numerous brothers and sisters sat on the garden fence and hilariously shouted "The Campbells *are* coming, oh dear, oh dear."

At last, worn out with the emotions of the most eventful day of my life, I fell asleep. When I awoke to a snow-clad world the next morning, I found that Aunt Milly had crept softly in during the night and covered me over with the warm coat in which Uncle J. chopped wood.

CHAPTER III

I LEAVE FOUR CORNERS

THE gaol, and its inmates, rapidly increased my knowledge of human nature. One day a furious giant came down from the mountains and indulged in a mad spree. The Sheriff was away, Uncle J. was away, and Aunt Milly was left in command. News reached her that the drunken bully was dragging a young horse round the square by its nostrils and threatening to kill anyone who interfered with him.

Aunt Milly quietly put on her fur coat and mitts, then went out and fixed the drunken man with her penetrating eyes, which now flashed indignant fire. "Let go that horse," she commanded. "Let go that horse."

The drunken bully began to swear.

Aunt Milly went up to him, laid her hand on his arm. "Let go that horse," she repeated.

He let go the horse. "Now," said Aunt Milly, "consider yourself under arrest for disturbing the public peace, and come with me."

He came with her. The undaunted little woman thrust him into a cell, locked the door, and left him to sleep off the effects of his debauch. That night Uncle J., despite her remonstrances, included him in our prayers.

"Stuff and nonsense, James," she broke out. "The man's past praying for."

"The dear Lord wouldn't think so," mildly declared

Uncle J., and put in five minutes' extra intercession for "our misguided brother."

I was down at the *Four Corners Gazette* office with Colonel Draper at the time of the arrest and did not know what had happened until it was all over. When I ran home, Aunt Milly calmly requested me to go back to my work. In a fit of enthusiasm, I had volunteered to learn how to set type—from my own articles—and it was tedious work, in spite of the encouragement of Mutt the foreman. "You'll get so darned sick of your own eloquence that you'll cut everything short," he declared, as he sat on a heap of "exchanges," and smoked the corncob of consolation. "It's the beginning of wisdom to cut everything short and, mostly, the ending of it."

He was quite right. Articles which began in my own mind as at least a column, under the influence of tedious type-setting dwindled down to one half, then to a paragraph. Mutt pulled a proof and put the turned letters downside up again. "You're learning the elements," he said quietly. "You can't write a book till you know how to write a paragraph." He was a great brawny giant of a man who hailed from Nova Scotia. Twice a year he ran "amok," that is, he went on a prolonged spree of exactly a fortnight's duration. Never was inebriety more carefully planned. The *Four Corners Gazette* announced that "Mr. Mutt, our esteemed foreman, is about to take a brief holiday with his friends in Nova Scotia." He took it in Millett's, the hotel-keeper's, back room, absorbed enormous quantities of whiskey, and, at the end of the fortnight, reappeared in the office. If it were a winter spree, he rolled in the snow until he became sober; if it were a summer one, he rolled in the river. In any case, he rolled somewhere and all his friends hoped that he

had enjoyed his visit to Nova Scotia. I met him one morning about three months after my arrival in Four Corners. Though covered with snow and unshaven, there was a merry twinkle in his blue eyes ; he seemed supremely happy.

" Well, Mutt," I inquired, " how did the spree go off ? "

" Be-yew-ti-fully," he drawled. " Be-yew-ti-fully. It was only brought to an abrupt and unlooked-for ending by the unexpected arrival of Monday morning. I always keep my dates. This time I'm convinced I've really been to Nova Scotia."

The blood feud (mostly confined to ink) between Mr. Driffle of the *Herald* and Colonel Draper of the *Four Corners Gazette* broke out afresh. Unfortunately, Colonel Draper was afflicted with enormous ears, and Mr. Driffle, in a review of the past year's events, took an ungenerous advantage of the fact by playfully congratulating the colonel on his escape from sudden death during a squall on the river. The colonel's canoe had been upset and Mr. Driffle summarised the incident thusly : " Most men in the circumstances would have been drowned, but the editor of our contemporary put up one of his ears for a sail and was safely wafted ashore." The colonel retaliated by promising to publish a portrait of Mr. Driffle in the next issue, and a whole page of the *Gazette* was devoted to the pictorial representation of a paste-pot and a pair of shears, with Mr. Driffle's name underneath.

I had rather a weakness for Mr. Driffle, who was a much more amiable man than Colonel Draper, and Mr. Driffle reciprocated my evident liking for him by leaving me in charge of the *Herald* whilst he took a brief holiday. " Make the paper lively," he said as he wished me good-bye, " and get up a boom."

At that age I would have edited Confucius without the

slightest misgiving. For some days all went well, but people were preternaturally good, which was strange, considering that there had been a revival meeting in the village. There is generally a reaction after one of those meetings. Somebody gets drunk, or steals a horse, or robs a house. But people were too badly scared by the last preacher to do anything of the sort. I wrote an article about Boadicea and her methods of driving, but the "comps" still wanted two columns to fill the vacant space. You know how it is when "the devil" demands "copy," and Nature says stop.

Just in the nick of time, however, a butcher on the other side of the Ottawa River shot off his nephew's arm. It seemed as if Providence had really watched over us and heard my prayers for a boom. We headed the article in big letters: "Murderous Outrage! An Uncle Shoots off his Nephew's Arm!! The Miscreant Still at Large!!!"; and a few other little complimentary sub-titles. When I went down to the *Herald* office the next morning, there was not a copy of the paper left. People were driving in for more copies. I was pleased to see the effect of my remarks on Boadicea, and said so. The postmaster, however, advised me to flee. He said that the butcher was rapidly nearing the village with a cowhide, and was so strong that he disdained to bring his gun. Of course I couldn't run before a mere butcher, although I wanted to—badly. The butcher came into the office and asked to see the editor. I said he saw the editor. He looked at my diminutive form, and used language which I will not repeat, but which implied that I was a near relation of Ananias. I retorted with, "We accept the responsibility for this article;" whereupon he made for me with a ruler, but the crowd rushed in, seized the butcher, and ducked him in the river, owing to the coarseness of his methods rather

than from any other motive. When Mr. Driffle came back he patted the lump on my head left by the ruler, and said that I wanted only a little more encouragement to become really great.

Both Mr. Driffle and the colonel were magnanimous enough not to include me in their quarrels. I dined at the colonel's house and supped with Mr. Driffle's five charming daughters with equal impartiality. Each chivalrously refrained from pumping me as to the intentions of the other. My article in the *Four Corners Gazette* on "The Primitive Clothing of our Ancestors" elicited Mr. Driffle's warm admiration. He said that it was "full of style," but forgot to mention what kind of style. When the colonel read a gifted contribution of mine (at that time, as Mark Twain says, "Information leaked out of me like otto of roses out of the otter") on "Polygamy is Moral Death," he said that few men with far more experience than mine could have put it in that way. And I, happily basking in the sunshine of his approval, felt that some day I should "arrive." Where I was to "arrive" had not yet occurred to me, but, on casually mentioning the fact to Sheila Campbell, she agreed that it must be some very important place indeed.

By this time we had long ceased to bother about such nonsense as writing books. Instead, we looked volumes at each other. All her brothers and sisters gradually drifted away and she was left to nurse an invalid father and mother. When the winter was over and gone and the time for the singing of birds had come, Sheila showed me the first robin on his arrival from the south. He seemed to me a thrush with a red breast and was so portly that he would have made half-a-dozen English robins had he been cut up into pieces. We roamed the Bush together, that great wonderful Canadian

Bush which is heaven's temple, and grew very shy. Her invalid mother regarded me with unconcealed contempt.

"Why does he go mooning about in the Bush looking at dragonflies and things? Why can't he dig potatoes or cut cordwood and earn an honest dollar? He'll never be anything in this world, and the sooner he turns his back on us the better I shall be pleased. He—he—he's not worth even a potato bug. Come in at once, Sheila, or I'll tell your father."

In the lovely spring evenings, I ostensibly went down to the *Four Corners Gazette* office to pursue my studies, but, in reality, ran with joyous steps to Sheila's verandah, a little way out of the village. We sat shyly on an old sofa with the stuffing coming out, and looked at each other. Just when I had made up my mind to tell her how much I loved her, there invariably sounded the thump-thump of the old lady's walking-stick as she crawled out to the verandah. "Half-past eight. Come, Sheila. Time all respectable"—with a strong emphasis on the word "respectable"—"people were in bed. You be off, young man." Generally, however, Sheila accompanied me to the gate. We looked at each other and looked and longed again. "It's no use, dear," she would say in answer to my impassioned protests. "Dearly as you love us all (I saw you pick up that habitant baby of old Ledoux's the other day) your life isn't going to be spent here. You will go back to England. As the years pass by, I shall become only a dream to you. I can't desert father and mother; they'd die right away. The others don't care, and leave them to me."

Though I knew she was right, my young heart grew very heavy. My money, changed into dollars, dwindled fast. What had I done so far? What had I accomplished in this

chimerical pursuit of writing books? Nothing, nothing, nothing, save a few silly, pretentious articles in the Four Corners' journals, and a little poem in the Montreal *Witness*.

Then came the news of my father's death. I must go back to England.

Sheila and I met for the last time on the moonlit verandah. She was very sad, very silent, very pale. "We shall never meet again, dear," she said in a level, almost emotionless tone. "We shall never meet again. All our beautiful dreams are only dreams. You couldn't earn your living here if you were to try. You must go back to your own people and forget me, although I never shall forget you."

When the inevitable hour of parting came, she showed me a little deerskin bag which she wore next her heart, and in that bag was my tiny poem. Something died within us both at that dreadful time. Years later I came again to Four Corners, eager to see her, eager to watch the light in her dear eyes: they were for ever closed in death.

She lies beneath the tender turf of the green little God's Acre a mile beyond Four Corners. Never again shall we walk down the old wharf to catch the evening breeze, idle in the nooks and corners, hear the wail of distant whip-poor-will, the eerie laughter of lonely loon, watch the silver moonlight pour its solemn benediction over the Ottawa's amber flood. Never again shall I hear her voice, dream the same dear dreams. Never shall I forget the vanished years when I knew no evil and all the world was beautiful because she walked beside me.

. . . . . .

"I told you," sobbed Aunt Milly as she clung to me on the morning of my departure for Montreal—"I told you that Sheila would teach you much. Never forget her, never

forget us. Your room will always be ready for you, and," with a momentary smile, "James will pray for you. If you suffer—and suffer we all must when we go forth to struggle with the world—if you suffer, come back to us when all-merciful Time has healed your wounds and you have learned in suffering what you will one day teach in—books!"

"May the dear Lord bless and watch over you," said Uncle J., and put his cherished Book of all books in my coat-pocket.

Kindly-hearted Mr. Mackonochie, the Presbyterian minister, thrust a letter into my hand as I left the wharf. "It's a few words of introduction to my wife's nephew, Wyville Home, who writes poems. It may be useful to you. Tell me all about it when you come back."

CHAPTER IV

MORE WANDERINGS

ENGLAND looked very dank and muddy when I got back to it, and depressed me. One day a friend told me that Valentine Baker Pasha, who was then in Constantinople, wanted a secretary. About three hundred candidates applied for the post, and I do not know to this day why I was chosen by the military-looking individual who selected me. He asked me at what time I could start and I said at twenty-four hours' notice. My friends scurried round and secured me several letters of introduction to Pera notabilities, and off I went *via* Marseilles.

A delightfully handsome grass-widow on board the Messageries Maritimes boat was accompanied by her married sister, Mrs. E—— W——, the wife of the editor of the *Levant Herald*. Our acquaintance began by Mrs. H—— asking me if I were quite sure I had not done anything which compelled me to leave my country for my country's good. Most people, she informed me, who went to Constantinople were actuated by that motive, but I must be too young. I was a nice boy but I wanted "forming." If the fates were propitious, she would form me. And, with Mrs. W——'s assistance, she did. When she asked me if I thought her commonplace and I enthusiastically replied that if she were making a pudding she would still be a human poem, she thought that the formative process might become rapid. And it did.

We ran up to the Piræus and then on to Constantinople, and the first word I heard at the Custom House was "bakshish." The official did not argue when I pretended not to hear him; he simply seized one of my dress shirts—it was a very wet day—and laid it face downward in the mud, took up another and was about to treat it in the same way when Allah restored my hearing and I gave him bakshish. A greasy hybrid thrust a card into my hand. "You come Lor' Byron's hotel—dam' good hotel." It was not, but I went, and the next morning departed for Baba Nakatch, a little village about seventeen miles from Constantinople, where Baker Pasha was constructing the Tchaldja line of fortifications.

When the train pulled up it was surrounded by a sea of mud. Under the impression that his brother Sir Samuel was coming to see him (our telegrams were mixed up) Baker Pasha had sent down a military escort under a very handsome officer of his staff. The officer poked his head through the carriage window and I explained who I was.

"Then you're not Sir Samuel Baker?" he miserably inquired.

"Unfortunately not. Will you have the kindness to look after my things?"

"Damn your impudence; I'm a staff officer," said he, and went away.

Which reminds me of a titled lady "doing her bit" during the war by scrubbing floors. "Please fill my pail for me," she said to a young officer who was passing. "Dammit, madam, I'm a staff officer," said he. "Dammit, sir, I'm a duchess," she retorted.

Presently my officer came back. "Of course it's your ignorance ordering me about. Can you ride?"

"A little."

"Well, the chief's sent his favourite Turcoman charger for you. Better let one of my fellows carry you to it."

One of "my fellows" carried me to a grey horse as big as an elephant, then went down on all fours in the mud and I stood upon his back and got on to that horse somehow. The way the Turcoman played pitch and toss with me for about seven miles was heartless. My legs would not go round him and Colonel A—— enjoyed my misery. "I wouldn't ride him on the curb if I were you," he said presently, and slowed down into a walk. But I was so stiff when we reached Baba Nakatch that I had to be lifted off the mountainous beast. "Had a bit of a gruelling, haven't you?" said the colonel a little more sympathetically.

Though my room had primitive furniture and a stork's nest immediately above it, I liked it. The chief's servant put an old door on a couple of wine boxes, and quilts on that, and the result was a very comfortable bed. My soldier servant was a simple child of nature called Halil. I did not know a word of Turkish, and when I wanted my riding boots looked out the word in a little Turkish dictionary. The next time I took up the dictionary, Halil ran away and brought back my boots. He would never go within a yard of that dictionary if he could help it. I pinned a little mirror in the lid of a collar box and fastened it up on the wall. On a deal table beneath stood a very gorgeous red embroidered handkerchief case given to me by a Canadian friend. One day I came in unexpectedly and found Halil standing on a wine box opposite the mirror. He had pinned the handkerchief case across his stomach and was trying to see the effect in the glass. When I presented him with the handkerchief case and gave him some string wherewith to tie up his ragged uniform, he became my slave for life.

After dinner my chief dictated to me a book he was doing on the Russo-Turkish war. I took it down in shorthand and wrote it out the next morning, so as to be ready for him in the evening. When dictating, he always shut his eyes and never hesitated for a word. In the afternoon I rode round the fortifications, and was once chased by a pack of semi-wild dogs. At night the bugles blew, the storks clattered their beaks on the roof, and, in spite of it all, I slept like a top.

Baker Pasha was the bravest man I have ever met. I remember his once doing a thing which was heroic in its way, although he treated it as a joke. A certain Turkish officer had quarrelled with him, and said as much as he dared about Englishmen's bravery or the lack of it. Baker Pasha thought for a moment, then took up a copper pot and poured out two cups of coffee.

"Dare you drink one?" he said to the Turk, and drank off his own. The Turk drank the other cup, then asked how drinking this particular coffee was a test of bravery.

"Simply this," said Baker Pasha; "I have just learned that the coffee was made with water taken from a well filled with the putrid bodies of dead Russians. I am not going to take an emetic. Are you?"

"Yes, I am," said the horrified Turkish officer, and rushed away to get it.

Colonel A—— had given me a beautiful Arab pony, a silver grey, and it followed me about like a dog. The old muezzin who woke me up in the morning, from the top of the village minaret, became very friendly. We sat for hours together by the marble fountain without exchanging a word, I busily writing, he communing with himself. And on Friday we always went into Constantinople and stayed there until Monday morning. One afternoon I was eager to get into

Pera for a ball to which I had been invited. As I rode down the hill to the station, my horse put his foot in a hole and pitched me on my head. Our noses bled, and we dejectedly crawled into the station. The station-master made no attempt to stop the train—it was the last passenger train—and when I said expressive things to him, mildly replied: "Why this unseemly rage, Effendi? There will be another train to-morrow." I got in at last on a goods engine, dressed in a cab and made my appearance at the ball. My chief had gone up earlier in the day. When he was expected, Colonel A—— sent down a mounted soldier to stand on the line until he arrived. Sometimes he was two hours late and the passengers of the waiting train resignedly played tric-trac (backgammon) until he came. It was the will of Allah. Why make a fuss about it?

At the ball, a very pretty girl asked me if I could get her some particular kind of wild flower which grew round Baba Nakatch. "Oh yes," I said loftily, "I'll turn out a regiment to look for it and send you some." "Wouldn't you prefer a battalion?" asked a mild and gentle voice behind me; and there stood my chief. He had a quiet gift of sarcasm which was extremely effective. When, for instance, Mrs. H—— once wrote him a note saying that she wanted to borrow me for a week but would not tell him the reason, as it was a secret (the W——s were getting up some theatricals) he wrote back, "My dear Mrs. H——, You know that I can refuse you nothing, and that my secretary's services are at your disposal. When a lady requests the presence of a gentleman for a whole week, be sure that I have far too much discretion to inquire the reason."

The W——s were ceaselessly kind to me and gave me the run of their house. Once only did I see Mrs. W—— angry,

and that was when a nephew of hers took me to a "silver hell" at the Concordia music-hall. We arrived behind the scenes, and I was awestruck but delighted. There were several ladies there; at least, I thought they were ladies, although I was rather shocked when one fainted with rage at losing her money and another lady cut her laces with a champagne opener. She was so tightly laced that the report sounded like a pistol shot. I won about seven and six at this silver hell, and was beginning to assume the airs of a hardened man of the world, when an old Spanish count, who frequented the W——s house, came up to me, took me firmly by the right ear, led me to the door and opened it. "You go home, little Burgins," he said in his broken English, "or I will give you the spank-spank."

But Mrs. W—— played a practical joke on me which might have had far more serious results. I was asking her about Turkish baths, and she said that the day set apart for Englishmen was, I think, Friday. Any way, this particular day was reserved for Englishmen, and it would be a base misuse of opportunity if I did not go to a certain bath. I happened to remember this one Friday morning and, reading a book and occasionally tumbling over a street dog, made my way to the bath. When I got there I absently pulled aside the curtain, still reading, and found myself looking down into a great white marble bath with thirty or forty different-coloured ladies splashing about "mit nodings on." Some were brown, some were white, some were betwixt and between, from coppery-red Nubians and negresses of inky hue to Circassians with yellow hair and milk-white skins. I do not know to this day how I visualised all this, for my stay at the bath lasted about three seconds. A gigantic negress rushed at me with a broom; I dropped my book into the bath and fled.

It was a curious chance how I came to be the only Englishman who has seen a portion of the Sultan's harem and lived to tell the tale. I was riding to Therapia one day when a cloud of dust appeared which ultimately resolved itself into a body of soldiers. They seized my horse (it was the chief's favourite Turcoman, and he allowed me to ride it because I was a light weight) and perhaps recognised it, for they pushed it back on a hillock by the wayside and commanded me not to move. Then, surrounded by nasty squeaky-voiced eunuchs, came the carriages of the Sultan's harem, most of them open. There had been a picnic at one of the summer palaces and the ladies were returning home. It was rather like one of those mannequin processions at the Hippodrome, and the variety of nationality was greater than I had seen at the bath. One woman was, I am certain, an Englishwoman. She looked a little sadly at me (the idiots who had pushed me out of the way never seemed to think that on that big horse I could see over the soldiers' heads) and pressed a rose to her lips. There must have been at least a hundred of these wives and those enigmatic ladies known as "porcupines."

At another time I was riding along a narrow street by the Bosphorous shore, when a lattice opened and a flower hit me on the nose. As I caught it, a gorgeously-arrayed man rushed through a little door, drew his yataghan, and smote my horse's flank with the flat of it. The horse did not stop to argue with him.

The time came at last when we had to move into town for the winter, and my chief suggested I had better sell my Arab pony, as he had no room for it. It hurt me very much to have to do this, but, after the manner of soldiers, a suggestion from him was a command, and I told Halil to take

the pony to the bazaar and sell it. When I got to Pera that evening, I met the chief's body-servant, one Joseph, a Greek, and Joseph said to me: "I know you're upset about selling the pony, sir. He's just about the right size for my little daughter. If you'll let me have him cheap, I'll take good care of him." Feeling a little less like a Judas, I agreed to sell him the pony for eight liras and he promptly produced the money. The next morning my man Halil came to me and asked, through the dragoman, if I had safely received the sixteen liras for which he had sold the pony. He had met Joseph in the bazaar and entrusted him with the money for me.

"You can get even with him any way you like as long as I keep him; he's too good a servant to lose," said my chief.

It was the custom to pay the servants every month. The money was ranged in little heaps on a table and each man took his heap. Next month the heap of Joseph was smaller than that of his brethren—eight liras smaller. He glanced at it, understood, his eyes twinkled; he picked up the money and vanished.

As a rule, I did not get even with people who swindled me, and when I received my salary spent a good deal of it, under the friendly guidance of the English Consul, in old arms and rugs and oddities of every sort. It always took a whole morning to buy a single rug. You began with coffee in the bazaar and looked at every rug you did not want. When you fixed on the rug you did want, you reviled it as a common rag and the carpet-seller asked fifty liras for it. Supposing its value to be five liras, he at last lowered the price to ten. Then you got up, yawned, walked away, and he sent a little boy after you to say, "Pay six liras, Effendi, and the carpet is yours."

All sorts of literary people were either passing through Pera or living there. The most delightful of them all was Frank Ives Scudamore, who at one time was Postmaster-General in England. We were talking about official and non-official language and he told me a story he had heard about Rowland Hill and Anthony Trollope. At a meeting at the Post-Office were Trollope and Hill. They cordially disliked each other and invariably took opposite sides. "For instance, Mr. Trollope," fiercely said Hill, "when I am writing to you officially I describe myself as 'your humble obedient servant,' whereas unofficially you know very well I'm nothing of the sort." But officially or unofficially, Mr. Scudamore was delightful to everybody, although when we first met I took a dislike to him for the utterly inadequate reason that he wore his hair long and it always dipped into his soup. Occasionally, he wrote verses filled with all the impassioned fervour of youth, and one lovely summer day, as we wandered by the Bosphorus shore, recited to me a mournful poem of which I have forgotten all but the last stanza:

"God is not always stern! The day will come
When in His mercy He will call me home
To thee, to thee, Irene!
Then will they lay me by thy little grave,
Close to the margin of the tideless wave;
And as we slumber in a common tomb,
The fragrant thyme around will once more bloom:
And every wind that rustles in the trees,
And all the ceaseless murmur of the bees,
And the cicala's never-ending song,
Will cry, 'Though joy was short, yet love was long:
He rests with thee, Irene!'"

A frequent visitor at the W——s was Laurence Oliphant, who had been a schoolfellow of my chief's. "He's a good fellow," said my chief to me once, "but he's always got a bee

in his bonnet, sometimes a whole hive of bees." The W——s had a Greek footman who never announced visitors by their names, but by some personal peculiarity, and the name generally stuck. Oliphant had a long flowing beard and was invariably announced as "The Prophet." I went in one day and Mrs. W—— laughed. "It's you, is it? You've just been announced as 'The Little Yellow One.'" Someone had previously dubbed me "Le Nouveau-né" because of my childlike belief in all who were kind to me, but "The Little Yellow One" came into more general use.

Oliphant wrote a celebrated book called "Piccadilly," and had had startling adventures all over the world. I was at the W——s one afternoon when he read a poem which he had embodied in "Piccadilly." He said (this was many years ago), "It is by the greatest poet of the age," and he afterwards gave me a copy of it:

"Reformers fail because they change the letter,
And not the spirit of the world's design.
Tyrant and slave create the scourge and fetter—
As is the worshipper, will be the shrine.
The ideal fails, though perfect were the plan,
World-harmony springs through the perfect man.

"We burn out life in hot impatient striving;
We dash ourselves against the hostile spears:
The bale tree, that our naked hands are riving,
Unites to crush us. Ere our manhood's years
We sow the rifled blossoms of the prime.
Then fruitlessly are gathered out of time.

"We seek to change souls all unripe for changes;
We build upon a treacherous human soil
Of moral quicksand, and the world avenges
Its crime upon us, while we vainly toil.
In the black coal-pit of the popular heart
Rain falls, light kindles, but no flowers upstart.

"Know this! For men of ignoble affection.
The social scheme that is, were better far
That the orbed sun's most exquisite perfection.
Man needs not heaven till he revolves a star.
Why seek to win the mad world from its strife?
Grow perfect in the sanity of life."

From Thomas Lake Harris, the poet in question, Oliphant divagated to Goldsmith's "Deserted Village," and began to quote it to an admiring circle. Suddenly his memory failed him and he stuck in the middle of a passage. As I once had to learn that particular passage for a holiday task I happened to remember it, and, without appearing to do so, slipped behind his chair and prompted him. He was absurdly grateful for such a small service and when I was going home on leave gave me a letter of introduction to Thomas Lake Harris, who had founded a colony in America. The story got about that Oliphant joined this Oneida Community, and, as a proof of his sincerity, was set to work cleaning out the Prophet Harris's stables. He devoted all his money and belongings to the common fund, but began to be sceptical when he found a village barmaid wearing a ring of his mother's. After that, he came back to the world. I have often regretted that I never presented my letter of introduction to the Prophet Harris. In the light of after experience, it seems to me that I missed the opportunity for a gorgeous novel had Harris prevailed upon me to accompany him to the Oneida Community.

Hobart Pasha, bluff, genial Englishman, a great favourite of the Sultan's, was also a frequent visitor at the W——s. He came in there one night before his second marriage and held out a watch which had been presented to him by Abdul Hamid, so encrusted with diamonds that it was impossible to see the case. An old joke obtained in Pera that whenever

the Sultan wanted anything explained away, he got Hobart Pasha to write to the *Times*.

The Constantinople foreign correspondent of a great English paper at that time kept up almost the estate of an ambassador. He had a palatial house, "Table Allowance" for entertaining, and was received everywhere. The *Times* correspondent, Sir Donald Mackenzie Wallace (he afterwards accompanied Lord Dufferin to India) had spent half of his life in Russia, in order to write a comprehensive book about it. When I asked him where I could get a copy of his book, he directed my attention to a trifle he had knocked off consisting of about a dozen Tauchnitz volumes. The great work was to follow after. Sir Valentine Chirol was also wandering about Greece and different parts of the East, and was especially grateful to me when I let him have my "Somerset" saddle. A hard saddle on long journeys is a very uncomfortable thing.

It was an education in itself for a youngster to meet all these men, and it was only the men who did not know anything, and whose conceit would not permit them to know anything, who snubbed one. The editor and proprietor of the *Levant Herald*, E—— W——, was one of the most brilliant and versatile men I have ever met or expect to meet. Sometimes, when he grew tired of his paper, he wrote a leader, well knowing that it would cause him to be suppressed for a month. He generally spent the month at a piano and came back to his work like a giant refreshed. His niece was accustomed to appeal to him if anything went wrong. In the middle of our performance of some theatricals, when she had to blow a trumpet and the trumpet refused to emit a sound, she turned to him as he sat in front of the stage and tearfully remarked, "Uncle, I fear that this is an untrustworthy trumpet." Then she went on with her part.

On another festive occasion, Mrs. W——'s sedan chair-bearers disappeared and fresh ones had to be recruited in a hurry from the men who sold the papers. When she arrived at the Persian Embassy, the bearers, from force of habit, shouted out: "Madame Levant Herald—Madame Levant Herald." The Master of Ceremonies announced her as "Madame Levant Herald" and for the rest of the evening she was officially known as "Madame Levant Herald."

I was staying at Petala's Hotel in Therapia during the summer, and hot baths were scarce in that establishment. Old Lady G——'s niece, a very beautiful and charming girl, ordered a hot bath; so did a nervous young friend of mine. They both met in their dressing-gowns at the bathroom door and she indignantly declared that no gentleman would think of taking her bath. "Madame," he nervously protested, "I can assure you that I had not the slightest intention of getting into hot water with you." Which rather reminds me of the irreverent Theodore Hook when he chanced to go into a Friends' Meeting House. Appalled by the unbroken silence, he produced a pork pie from his pocket. "The first who speaks shall have this pie," he sadly declared. "Profane scoffer, get thee hence," answered a member of the assembly. "Sir," said Theodore Hook, "the pie is yours."

One night, when I was dining at the British Embassy, I was ushered in by a little negro clad in the most gorgeous costume. He was known as Jerry Vulture, because he had been taken by the crew of the *Vulture* from a slave dhow which they had demolished. Jerry was the only living thing on board. Lady Layard made a pet of him, and my friend Mrs. Walker, the well-known writer of "Eastern Life and Scenery," painted him in all his magnificence. When the Layards went away from Constantinople, they intended

to send for Jerry, but by some mischance forgot all about him, and he was relegated to the stables. As I was riding past the Embassy one day I caught him inflicting vengeance on a small boy with whom he had quarrelled. Jerry's method was to take the other boy by the ears, and bang the back of his victim's skull on the stone steps. I applied my riding-whip to that part of his person which was most in evidence and he fled with a wild war-whoop. Some time after I saw him at a collection of local pictures in Pera. He was clad in his dirty stable garb and looking at the painting of himself in all its riot of colour and magnificent robes. "That me—once!" he explained to an equally dirty and sympathising friend.

At this time, in accordance with the Treaty of Berlin, the Turks employed, or pretended to employ, certain foreign officers in the Gendarmerie. They gave them as little to do as possible and generally managed to evade payment of their salaries. One Englishman, Colonel N——, went to our ambassador about the non-payment of his salary, and the ambassador insisted on his being paid. Two officials from the Turkish War Office came to the colonel's house on the following morning leading two donkeys laden with his salary in copper coins. The colonel indignantly remonstrated, whereupon the Turks said that copper was a legal tender and that they would tie the donkeys to a post in front of the door, and come back for them in half an hour. If the colonel did not take the money, that was his affair. Then they disappeared.

Directly they were out of sight, the colonel and his man unloaded the money, took it into the house and sold the donkeys in the nearest bazaar. After that, he never had any more trouble about his salary.

When my chief did not feel like dictating his book, he sometimes left me for a week at a time with the editor of the *Levant Herald*, who set me to work seeing the paper to press. Of course I made heaps of mistakes, until I gradually realised that the things I did not know about seeing a paper to press, if duly set out, would fill a big book. The cashier was a Greek who periodically disappeared to Athens with the cash-box, and was under the impression that I was employed to spy upon him. When the affair had blown over, he was so useful that the editor always took him back again. The sub-editor was an Englishman who loved cats. He had one old tabby who was a great thief, and one day he brought the dismembered remains of the tabby to me with tears in his eyes. "It's a perfect wreck," he said. "The poor thing simply went into a butcher's shop because it was hungry, and the butcher—may he be for ever condemned to perdition —nearly chopped him in two." We got in an expert on cats ; he sewed the tabby together again, and, strange to say, the animal actually recovered from its fearful injuries.

What with balls, tennis and dinners, my afternoon ride and lessons in modern Greek, the time passed very happily when my chief left me behind him, and I always returned to Baba Nakatch with a certain reluctance, because I knew that the rascally dragoman was waiting for a chance to blight my young life. He had been educated at the Robert College (American) in Constantinople, and his credentials affirmed that he was an eminently pious and trustworthy young man. If so, by the time he came to us he had entirely grown out of it, for a bigger scoundrel never walked the earth. He was a great coward and very plausible.

One day the chief was dissatisfied with the dragoman's accounts and told me to make a searching investigation of

them at twenty-four hours' notice. That night I went to bed early, and the rascal put a lighted mangal (a kind of open brazier) behind a screen in my room. It was filled with charcoal only partly burnt up. The proper course was to light the charcoal in the courtyard and wait until it burned clear before taking it into a room. If it were not burnt up, the fumes were deadly. I went to bed, suddenly awoke feeling suffocated, staggered to the door and fell insensible outside it. The dragoman was the first to pick me up and implore the vengeance of Allah on the wicked carelessness of the Greek cook who had started the mangal.

At another time, Colonel A——lent me his horse, which was a notorious bolter with sand-cracked heels. He said that I was afraid to ride it, and so, to show that I was not afraid, although I was very much afraid, I agreed to ride it. The dragoman stood by eagerly listening to our conversation, and, with equal eagerness, brought the horse to me the next day, at the same time, with tears in his eyes, imploring me to have nothing to do with the accursed beast : I was so young and beautiful that I ought not to be cut off in my prime and it was quite excusable to be afraid of it.

For the first couple of miles all went well. Then the brute turned round and suddenly bolted back to the stables. The Turkish soldiery at Baba Nakatch had pulled down a thick telegraph wire and stretched it across the road. They used it to dry their clothes on. Directly I was out of sight, the dragoman, knowing what would happen, rushed out, lowered the telegraph wire to about the height of a horse and made it fast round a post opposite. I saw it just in time, lay flat in the saddle, and as we passed under the wire it scraped the back of my coat. If I had not seen it, the wire would have cut me in two.

I had the wire taken away and "bucketed" the beast uphill for a couple of miles. When we came back he could scarcely crawl, and Colonel A—— said that I had made his—the horse's, not Colonel A——'s—heels worse.

Then the dragoman had a row with Colonel A——, who promptly kicked him downstairs. He told me about it and said that he would pray to Allah to punish Colonel A—— for ill-treating so beautiful a person as himself. One morning he came to me delightedly: "Effendi, Allah has heard my prayers. He has punished Colonel A——."

It appeared that on the previous evening, Colonel A—— was going down Step Street, which consisted of a succession of stone terraces. His sword tipped out of its scabbard, the handle stuck in a crevice, and, in stooping to recover it, Colonel A—— slipped and was run through the thigh. "Now," said the dragoman, "I think I had better make my peace with the colonel. I will give him a beautiful present and he will never kick me any more."

The next day he showed me a basket of very fine peaches. "Effendi, this is the present I am taking to Colonel A—— to make him my friend. Do you know of any way in which to poison peaches?"

My chief sent for me that evening. "I am going to Asia Minor in a week as head of a Reform Commission. You will be its secretary and come with me."

CHAPTER V

IN ASIA MINOR

By the time the Commission reached Alexandretta, I knew all the members of it by heart, or fancied that I did. One Säid Pasha and his friend Suleiman Pasha, the leading lights of it, were sent by the Turkish authorities to keep an eye on us. If the European Powers insisted on making a fuss about Asia Minor and the Armenians and the Kurds and the tax-collectors, they would have to be humoured. These mad English never would let anything alone. Asia Minor, from the Turkish point of view, had gone on very satisfactorily for hundreds of years without any absurd talk of reform and progress. What was the good of reform and progress? They only unsettled people and prevented them from bringing bakshish to those set in authority over them. So Säid, a fat, pleasant-faced, grey-bearded little man, and Suleiman, dark, tall, thin, saturnine, accompanied us and had everything ready for the occasion. There were always happy and contented peasants who had never heard of tax-collectors, always flourishing Armenians whose wives and daughters had not been taken into Turkish harems, always amiable Kurd chiefs whose gentle actions were misrepresented and misunderstood. Though my chief knew what was going on, he said nothing, but quietly used his eyes and ascertained facts for himself.

At Aleppo, the Commission held its first meetings. By

this time I had a bay pony with a plain saddlecloth. Something went wrong with him, and my chief sent me back to get one of his private papers, which were always guarded by his own servant. A Turkish lieutenant obligingly lent me his horse with one star on the saddle-cloth, and the crowd in the courtyard bowed down before my sudden promotion.

Presently the same thing happened again, and this time I rode a horse with two stars. The crowd congratulated me on my rising rank, and I spent the rest of the day in riding to and from my chief's quarters for different documents as they were wanted. By four o'clock I had a horse with the number of stars pertaining to a general of division on his saddlecloth, and the crowd in the courtyard bowed down before me with greater reverence than before: "Lo, the English are a great people whom we in our folly believed to be afflicted of Allah. In the morning this little Giaour was without a single star and now he is a pasha and a general with five stars. Inshallah, but it is wonderful!"

At last I grew tired of borrowing horses and decided to walk back to my room at the Governor's. When I came out on foot the crowd no longer bowed down before me. "Allah is just," they said, "and he has punished this young man for his presumption. Now he has not even a horse of one star and is humbled to the dust."

We left Aleppo for Diabekir with its walls of black basalt, and then started down the Tigris on kellaks for Baghdad. A kellak is a raft made of poplars under which are inflated goatskins. The Romans used the same kind of thing hundreds of years ago. A tent is put up at one end of the raft and a man at the front end steers with a clumsy oar. Someone gives the kellak a shove and you start off downstream. We had to split up into parties. Tahir Bey (he had been in

the constabulary in India and spoke English) and his son Youssouf, a young German surveyor named Schaeffer, and myself were on one raft. General Herbert Chermside (all the world has heard of him since) and my chief and the two Turkish pashas were on another raft. The servants and baggage and military escort filled up two more rafts, and away we went :

> " Gently, as we sometimes glide
> Through a quiet dream."

A party of predatory Kurds waylaid us at a narrow bend of the river, but the escort drove them off, and at the next bend we encountered a number of Kurdish women bathing. They did not turn from us as we appeared, but tied their long hair round their faces and stood motionless.

When halfway to Baghdad, we changed our plans, abandoned the kellaks and struck out north for Sivas. Before we left our kellaks, Chermside sometimes spent an evening with me and we " swapped " poems. Tahir Bey was an amusing old pig, but very selfish : so was his son, Youssouf. One night, on our way to Sivas, we discovered that there was a famine in the land, and were compelled to split up into small parties. Most of our baggage and the cook went astray, but somehow that old campaigner, Tahir Bey, managed to carry his with him. There was nothing to eat and we bargained with the head man of a village for an elderly rooster and an equally aged goose. " Where's the rooster ? " asked Tahir of the head man, after making sure of the goose.

" There he is, excellency. Walking about and waiting for you."

Tahir told his son Youssouf to run after the rooster and cut its head off. Youssouf drew his sword and started.

The rooster put out.

Just as Youssouf got within striking distance, three huge Kurdish hounds sprang at him, and by the time he had beaten them off the rooster was fifty yards away. History repeated itself for half an hour, until the rooster ran into the darkness and was no more seen.

"There is nothing but the goose," said Tahir sadly, "but it will take a long time to cook. You, Burgin Effendi and Schaeffer Effendi, can cook the goose's liver and divide it between you. Youssouf and I will have the rest of the goose."

It was an enormous liver, and Schaeffer winked at me to agree. We toasted the liver on a fork before the fire.

With the aid of some big biscuits we made an excellent meal, Tahir groaning as he sat before the fire and clasped fat hands over a protuberant but empty stomach. "It is a fine goose, a fine goose," he kept repeating, "but it takes a long time to cook."

He boiled the goose for hours and when it was taken out of the pot, eagerly stuck his teeth into it. It required our united efforts to get them out again.

"Is there any liver left, O Greedy Ones?" he sadly asked us.

We told him that there was not, and that the toughness of the goose served him right for his greediness. He made up a sumptuous bed in the corner of the hut. The night was bitterly cold, and Schaeffer and I had nothing but a thin rug to cover us, whilst Tahir and his son snored away with three or four thick blankets over them.

"I do not like dis; no, I do not like dis," Schaeffer kept murmuring to himself.

He crawled on his stomach across the floor, pulled off one blanket and brought it back to me.

"I do not like dis; no, I do not like dis. One is not enough," he repeated, crawling off and returning with another blanket.

Tahir Bey woke up, cuffed his son soundly for disturbing him and went to sleep again.

Schaeffer once more crawled over to them, dexterously twitched off the remaining blanket, left it on the floor, came back to me, and we camouflaged with a piece of old carpet the blankets we had stolen. Tahir woke up, saw our carpet and cuffed Youssouf again. "Pig that you are," he said angrily, "you have let the Kurds steal our blankets."

At daybreak we put the blankets back again and Tahir was mystified, for he had passed an almost sleepless night owing to the cold.

Whenever we reached an American Mission Station the members of the Mission were very kind to us. At Kharpoot, which is supposed to be on the site of the Garden of Eden, they had a big college, and one missionary was a very practical man, for he had taught the Armenians to grow potatoes, and the potatoes saved them from dying of starvation in famine years. These missionaries were very sincere, earnest-minded people, although one of them, a spinster of uncertain age, was rather addicted to high-falutin phraseology and talked about her "palfry elevating its hind heels." There certainly was not much chance of her kicking up her own in such a place as Sivas.

One gaunt, black-browed missionary, a man of commanding presence, had a very costly Persian silk carpet. It must have been worth two or three hundred pounds. He caught me looking at it several times. "You wonder how such a costly carpet came into the possession of a poor missionary? Very well, I'll tell you."

"It's so beautiful that it would be almost excusable to murder its original possessor in order to get hold of it."

"That's what bothers me. I'm pretty certain that its original owner was murdered in order that I might possess it."

I scented a story and asked him to tell me.

"One day an old scoundrel of a Kurdish chief (he had the worst reputation of any among his fellow ruffians) came to me with a bullet wound in his leg. Of course, I thought it wiser not to ask him how he got it. It was a very nasty wound and at one time I had grave doubts as to whether I could save the leg. Who ever heard of a Kurd chief with one leg! He would have been deposed at once. The only way to look after him properly was to take him into my house and see that he carried out my orders. When I came to know him better, I saw that, from his point of view, he was not nearly so much a scoundrel as I imagined. At all events, he was very grateful when I saved his leg, and still more grateful when I told him there was nothing to pay. 'But, Hakim,' he replied, 'my honour demands that I should make you a present. What would you like?'

"I did not want anything and told him so, but at last, to get rid of his importunities, I said that I would like a nice little carpet, quite a small one. After vainly entreating me to accept a large one, he departed. For two years I saw him no more and, although I was a little sore at his forgetfulness, he gradually passed out of my mind. After the two years had passed, he turned up again with a huge bale, had it carefully brought in and unrolled by two of his verminous followers, and displayed this magnificent carpet—pure silk and at least a couple of hundred years old. 'Hakim,' he said, after we had exchanged salutations, 'I have brought

you a carpet. I would have brought it before but I could not steal one good enough for you after all that you have done for me.'

"I protested that I could not possibly accept so valuable a gift, the more especially as he had obtained it dishonourably. Whilst I appreciated his intentions, it would give me far more pleasure if he would return the carpet to its lawful owner.

"'That is impossible,' he said with a crestfallen air.

"'Why?'

"'Well, you see, Hakim, he valued his carpet so much that I had to cut his throat before he would consent to part with it.'

"'But you can restore it to his relatives.'

"'Oh no, I can't. He was on a pilgrimage to Mecca and no one knew who he was or anything about him.' So I ended by accepting the carpet. Did I do right?"

His last remark reminded me of a girl who wrote to the editor of a young ladies' paper which was an authority on all questions of social etiquette, and wanted to know the same thing. She had casually met a young officer in a tea-shop, lunched with him, dined with him, and at night he had driven her back to her flat. She wound up her story by asking the editor, "Did I do right?" and the editor sternly replied, "Try hard to remember."

Baker Pasha was going on to Erzeroum and wanted me to return to Constantinople to look after his interests there, so I made my way to Samsoun and thence back to Pera.

My friends were delighted to see me again, and one of them informed me, "We have not been without reminders of you during your absence, for every other day we have seen your landlady's husband going down to the bazaars in

your frock-coat and pot hat. You'd better keep quiet for a few days. You're looking ill."

I felt ill, but did not know what was the matter with me. My Armenian servant was very attentive, for I had rescued him from an awkward scrape and thought that he was attached to me. Day by day, however, I grew worse. He went off for a holiday. I turned yellow, could not eat, and as Christmas approached was very much exercised as to which of three invitations I should accept for my Christmas dinner.

One morning I could not get up and life became a sort of nightmare until the W——s, alarmed at not having seen anything of me, sent a servant round to inquire. I told him that I should be all right in a day or two, and that evening as I lay on my bed half-unconscious and wholly without power to move, my Armenian servant returned.

He cast one glance at me. "You're sickening for typhoid, Effendi. I don't think you'll get better, and I may as well have your things."

He took down my rugs and weapons from the walls, carefully wrapped up the daggers, swords, and pistols, then went through my pockets, annexed the sleeve-links from my shirt, and put my watch in his own pocket. "I don't think I have forgotten anything," he said cheerfully. "You see, if you die you won't miss these things and they'll be very useful to me. Good-bye, Effendi. I'm going back to Armenia."

My old friend, Dr. Patterson, the Embassy doctor, next appeared on the scene. He was followed by two brawny porters who, after carefully wrapping me up in blankets, carried me to a sedan-chair. My nose hit against the glass as we went down hill. I was put to bed in Dr. Patterson's private room in the hospital and vaguely remember being

awakened from my comatose state by feeling some water trickling on my nose and hearing a solemn voice saying things. When I got better, I met the Embassy chaplain one day, and he said: "What's your confounded middle name?"

"Why do you want to know?"

"Oh, when they thought you weren't going to live, you were raving that you hadn't been baptised, so they sent for me and I did it all over again to make sure, but I couldn't remember your middle name."

One morning, about a fortnight after Christmas, I woke up and a pleasant-faced nurse came to me. "What is it?" she enquired.

"Nurse, where did I have my Christmas dinner?"

"You haven't had it yet. Better go to sleep again."

My first visitor in the hospital was my somewhat hysterical Hungarian landlady. She had a fat round painted face and did her hair in two horns which stuck up from the top of her forehead. On seeing this red face and horns bending over me I shrieked, and the nurse ran to my side.

"What's the matter? Whatever's the matter?" she asked.

"Good-bye, nurse. Good-bye. It's all up with me. The devil's come for me at last."

"What does the dear angel say?" anxiously enquired my landlady, who did not understand English.

"He says he is very glad to see you," diplomatically replied the nurse.

Patterson told me that one night at the crisis, when there was very little hope for me, I was struggling and crying out for my mother. He sent for his wife. "Take hold of his hand, kiss him and pretend to be his mother," he said. After that I became quiet, and the crisis passed.

Still, though I was getting better, I had many troubles. After typhoid you must not eat anything hard. Once the tissue-like membrane of the stomach is perforated, blood-poisoning sets in and you die. I was allowed one egg for breakfast at daybreak and used to lie awake listening to the tinkling of the goat-bells as the herd drew near. Each customer brought out a bottle and the goatherd milked into the bottle. By the time the bells sounded quite near, it was time for my egg and two thin pieces of bread and butter. The nurse fed me one morning and was surprised when I burst into tears.

"What's the matter?" she asked soothingly.

"It's such a little, little egg," I sobbed.

I knew that I had recovered from the typhoid by the skin of my teeth. The door leading into the next room was always open. There was a coffin on the bed, draped in a sheet, and it worried me because I knew that it had been intended for me if the worst came to the worst. One night I could bear it no longer. If I could but touch that coffin I should not be afraid of it. The nurse was fast asleep in her chair, and I tumbled out of bed. There was no flesh on my legs and the floor hurt terribly, but I wormed myself, with intervals of rest, over the floor until I came to the bed, then drew myself up, shut my eyes and pulled away the sheet.

Someone had been cleaning the room and had put the fender and fireirons on the bed.

The nurse woke up and carried me back to bed again. The next morning I felt ever so much better.

In the daytime an old sailor looked after me, and I was very anxious to know from him whether in my delirium I had used any unbecoming expressions, any really bad language.

"No, sir, no," he said musingly. "You did cuss and damn a bit, but not more than a real gentleman ought to do."

He told me of a sailor in the hospital who was also recovering from typhoid. Like myself, he was afflicted with an acute hunger, and his messmates told him that there was a big pantry full of meat in the area below. By thrusting his arm between the bars, he could get as much food as he wanted. They brought him a rope, and he let himself down one night, put his arm through the bars and could just touch a huge shoulder of mutton with his finger-tips. He was so weak that he could not climb up the rope again and was found there the next morning.

"Of course he's dead now," I said.

"Not a bit of it, sir. He's no more dead than you were that night when you tried to get out of the winder and I pulled you back by the slack of your jarmers."

I heard afterwards of another young fellow who was recovering from typhoid in the hospital. A friend came in to see him, and the patient complained that he was being starved. "I've a whacking big apple," said the other. "Think you can manage it?" The poor fellow thought he could, and—died.

. . . . . .

"You'll have to lie up for at least a year," said my kindly friend Dr. Patterson. "This is no place to get well in. Better go home."

When I called on the W——s to say good-bye to them, it was a very sorrowful leave-taking. "Do you—do you think I'm quite 'formed' now?" I asked Mrs. H——.

"I've done my best—and worst," she said reflectively. "Think only of the best."

I wondered what she meant.

CHAPTER VI

THE BEGINNING OF THINGS

When I reached England and was well enough to work, there was nothing for it, until something turned up, but to go into a city office, so I reluctantly went. I could write shorthand fairly well and use a typewriting machine, then a wild innovation. Naturally, would-be authors have a great deal of writing to do. Making or mending roads is mere child's play in comparison with it. All other things being equal, if I had the choice between copying out a long novel or mending a road, I would unhesitatingly choose the latter. You can have intervals for reflection while mending roads. All the gentlemen I have ever met (except the Ruskinians) at work on the roads, sat for hours upon heaps of broken granite (with a sack over it) drinking beer from tin tea-cans, or else meditatively munching huge wedges of bread and bacon. Then the foreman came along and did the work himself whilst they gave him advice about the best way of filling up the holes.

In those days, typewriters were very different from what they are now. They were heavy; you had to push them along by main force; pull a string to make the carriage run properly; and ignore capital letters. When I decided to buy a typewriter, the man at the shop offered to teach me how to work the machine, but it seemed to me no mere mortal ought to come between the author and his typewriter, and

that I would rather find out for myself. He smiled pityingly and went away.

Then the fight began. The thing would not do anything after one preliminary spurt, when it started off with a rush. It declined to spell, to be grammatical, to furnish me with ideas. Every now and then it rang a little bell jeeringly, as if to call my attention to the fact that it was there. We began at eleven in the morning. When the evening sun was low, our relative positions were unaltered, and I was also feeling low. The next day the man from the shop looked in as if by accident, sat down before the machine, and rattled off a dozen lines from Browning. Then he left me, and the thing jibbed again. In a week, however, it condescended to know me, and began to settle down to its work.

Now the typewriter is the second-best friend I have in the world. Whenever I am lazy, or inclined to forget that will-o'-the-wisp which men call Ambition, I sit before the typewriter, put a sheet of paper in it, and wait. Presently my fingers begin to stray softly over the keys, the soul of this mere machine awakens, it throws itself with ardour into my mood, grave or gay. And it does not criticise. It forces one to work, seconds one to the best of its ability, is never discouraged by results, however inadequate they may be, but simply says, "We did a good spell of work that time, didn't we? Shouldn't be surprised if editors wanted another story like that soon. And some day, when editors are clamorous, and you have a secretary and dictate things, don't let him touch me. Have an up-to-date machine, if you like, but keep me in your study corner for the sake of old times when we did that first serial, and, as the nights went by, you sat down in front of me after your hard day's work in the city, the touch of your fingers on my keys growing

weaker and weaker, your face thinner and thinner, until, one supreme grey dawn, the word 'Finis' came to our story. Do you remember how you came in with a letter one day, laid it on me, told me that our story had been accepted by an editor, and that the gateway was open to you? You couldn't have pulled through without me then, could you?"

The firm whose business methods I elected to enlighten dealt in Canadian timber. That was why I chose it out of two other chances. I was to be at the office at nine, with an hour for lunch, and leave it at six. Unfortunately, the bow-legged senior partner never dined until eight and went out to tea at four when he ought to have been dictating letters to me. He returned about six and seemed surprised if I looked tired. Sometimes I left the office at seven, sometimes at a quarter to eight. Though my relations were very kind to me, I felt that until I had justified my existence I ought not to inflict myself upon them. So I took a pleasant "bed-sitting-room" in an old house in Featherstone Buildings, Holborn, and when I did get home sat up until three in the morning endeavouring to write a book. It seemed a very real book to me then, for they were trying times at the office and it was my only consolation. When I was not writing letters, the venerable cashier thrust a huge volume into my hand in which I was expected to copy out all the invoices. The more I copied, the more there were. He took a saturnine pleasure in making the pile larger. There was I perched on a high stool at a mahogany desk, the only thing to cheer me being the view of a disused graveyard frequented by rakehelly cats.

And the social conditions were so different. I had consorted with distinguished men and women, been welcomed for myself at the houses of charming people, and now was a

mere insignificant "siphon" whose sole business it was to be at the beck and call of individuals who had little or no pretensions to refinement. In short, through force of circumstances, I had suddenly become that most-to-be-pitied of all unhappy beings, a city clerk.

At first I tried to learn something about the business. Most of the other men were decent enough fellows in their way save for one fixed idea: if they taught me anything, I would try to steal their places. So they quietly blocked all my attempts to become useful, and there I sat day after day, eating my heart out, wandering bitterly why Fate should deal so hardly with me, why I could not learn to calculate the cubical contents of what had once been trees.

I had no opportunity of learning anything whatever, and had to say, "sir" when I answered my ungrammatical chief. Sometimes he wanted to know things I could not tell him. My desperation became so poignant that if he had ever heard of Macbeth I would have reminded him of the unsuccessful commercial traveller who, when his firm complained that he did not get any orders and wanted to know the reason why, wrote back and referred it to Macbeth (Act 2, Scene 1.). The partners at length discovered from the office boy that Macbeth was a play written by one William Shakespeare, so sent out for a copy and found the line in question to be, "It is the bloody business which informs thus to mine eyes." This timber business "informed" my tired optics in a similar manner.

Then came a little light. By the merest chance in the world, as I was one day broken-heartedly trying to force myself to eat my lunch, I took up a copy of the London edition of the *Detroit Free Press* and saw therein an announcement of a competition for a serial story. Some fabulous

sum, at least a couple of hundred pounds, was to be paid to the winner of the competition. That night I set to work on a story of my Canadian experiences. I was assisted in my labours by a maimed old black cat who had appeared from no one knows where and attached himself to me. Sometimes, until I learned to love him for his wise and gentle ways, I thought that he was the devil in disguise come to do a deal for my soul, though why my soul should be of any particular value to the devil or anyone else, I did not know. It was only when the black cat took up his stand on the doormat, and waited every evening for my coming, that I began to notice him. When I had supper he was too much of a gentleman to beg, but sat there gravely as if trying to explain that it was my society he wanted. God knows I wanted his badly enough. I explained to him that, unless he ate with me, we could not be friends, and this scarred old warrior of a thousand roof fights, like the true gentleman he was, took me at my word, slept at the foot of my bed, and, when he thought I was half-killing myself at the typewriter, gently laid his rheumatic paw upon the keys as much as to say, "Hold. Enough." Without him I should never have survived the loathsome drudgery of that city office, although the other men seemed to thrive on it. They were quite pleasant, but looked upon me as one afflicted by Allah. I grew thin and pale and had to wear blue glasses, for my eyes were weak. And the weaker they grew from the burning of midnight oil, the more that cashier piled up the invoices on my desk. He was an old, old man, a veteran of eldest eld, who sat there from nine to six, never went out to lunch, and all the time when he was not drawing cheques got more invoices ready for me to copy. He was as dry as the biscuits on which he lunched.

I had long since forgotten the introduction to Wyville Home which Mr. Mackonochie had given me before I left Canada, but one night at a bookstall I picked up a piece of music with the title of "Sunshine and Rain. Words by Wyville Home. Sung by Madame Antoinette Sterling." I took the song back with me and wrote to Home. He was pretty high up in the Post-Office, and, though I admired his song, I was not sanguine that he would take any notice of my letter, so I continued to plod away at my story, at length finished it, and sent it in for the *Detroit Free Press* competition. That night the black cat and I had a modest feast to celebrate the event. At last I had done something to justify my ambition. Somehow, since Sheila had become only a memory to me, I was not greatly moved by anything. For one thing, I was on the verge of a physical breakdown, and the black cat grew anxious. Opposite my room in Featherstone Buildings was a public-house. Every Saturday night various artistes stood outside it and performed. Although I know scarcely a note of music, I have an ear for it, and had to keep time to them on the typewriter. "The Death of Nelson" was easy work, but when it came to a merry Irish jig, the keys were hopelessly mixed up and the black cat protested. He did not like music, was absolutely honest about it, and went under the sofa and uttered blood-curdling miaouws.

Wyville Home answered my letter very cordially and invited me to dine at his rooms. I liked him at once. He was about ten years my senior, and had asked a very delicate-looking young friend of his to meet me. This poor fellow, little more than a lad, was evidently in the last stages of consumption. I think he also was in the Post-Office. When Home congratulated him on having had a short story accepted by a magazine, he smiled faintly and said that the most

cheering thing about the next world was that, presumably, there were no letter-boxes in it for rejected MSS.

They chatted familiarly about literary lions whose very names filled me with awe. Home turned to me. "Mr. Mackonochie says you want to write. Would you care to meet Philip Bourke Marston, F. W. Robinson, and Aveling, and all the others at 'The old Vagabonds'?"

Would I care! My dormant ambitions revived.

"That's all right, then. We meet at Pagani's. I'll drop you a line," said Home. "Herbert Clarke will be there too. You're looking tired. Don't overdo it."

And it was owing to his kindness that I went to Pagani's a fortnight later. Also, I had had a story accepted, a very little story, by F. W. Robinson, the veteran author of "Grandmother's Money" and fifty other well-known works. I feel convinced to this day that I owed its acceptance to Home.

Before going to "The Old Vagabonds," I was invited one evening to hear an address by Mrs. Annie Besant at a private house somewhere in St. John's Wood. It was all about Mahatmas and I had never met any, but her wonderful voice mesmerised me and I listened as if spellbound. At the conclusion of her address, Mrs. Besant inquired whether anyone among the audience would like to ask questions. A man got up, and, with a strong nasal accent, delivered himself: "Well, Mrs. Be-sant, don't you think that if these Mahatmas have been floating about the yuniverse all the time you say they have, they've been a darned lazy crowd?" Mrs. Besant's reply was: "In answer to this question, I was under the impression at the beginning of this discussion that nothing should be said which could by any possibility hurt the feelings of anyone else." "Gosh, if they're as lazy as all

that, I don't understand how them Mahatmas have any feelings," murmured the unabashed interrogator.

On the eventful "Old Vagabond" evening, we met in a room at Pagani's, in Great Portland Street, a little room the walls of which were covered with sketches, bars of music, and caricatures by unknown artists who have since "arrived." F. W. Robinson, a short, stout, grey-haired man, with benignant, jolly face, was in the chair, and, seeing that I was a newcomer, took me into a corner and made me feel as if I had known him all my life. "That's Dr. Westland Marston," he said, pointing to a distinguished-looking elderly man with a thoughtful, refined face. "He's the author of innumerable plays: his 'Patrician's Daughter' was brought out at Drury Lane by the great Macready.[1] Now he's practically forgotten, as most of us seem to be, and lives again in his son, the blind poet over there, Philip Bourke Marston, who lost his eyesight when he was three." He looked at his watch. "Shall I tell you a little story I've heard about him?"

I listened eagerly.

"This is the version I have heard. All his life poor Marston has been dogged by misfortune. I daresay you've noticed he's blind. He was engaged to a very beautiful girl and he came to her one day. She answered his eager greeting, and he felt his way to the sofa on which she sat. This time, she did not answer. She had died suddenly. Heart disease. He got over that at last. Then his friends Rossetti and Oliver Madox Brown died. Still he struggled on, and learned to use a typewriter. One day he groped his way to his typewriter, put in a sheet of paper and began a

[1] I met General Sir Nevil Macready at a dinner a short time ago and had the satisfaction of hearing him say, "By heredity, I am an actor; by profession, a soldier; by compulsion, a policeman."

story. Hour after hour passed as he clicked away and threw each sheet on the floor. At last he finished the best story he had ever written, and when his man came into the room, told him to pick up the sheets scattered on the floor and read them to him. *The sheets were all blank.* His man had taken out the typewriter ribbon and forgotten to put in a new one. The story was never re-written. Now everything is grey to him. His life is grey, his wonderful sonnets are grey, and he is rapidly descending to a grey grave. I'm telling you this as it was told to me."

He looked round at a group of men by the table. "That little man with the sinister face is Aveling—an Irving cut off at the knees. He has a devilish magnetism about him. After dinner we always make him recite 'And I am alone with my Ale Can.' It's the story of a man who kills an unfaithful wife and then is—alone with his ale can, thinking over what he has done. Old as I am, it makes my flesh creep. He's a wonderful being, but I don't trust him ; a sort of modern Socialistic Mephistopheles. That young fellow with the bright eager face is one of my boys on *Home Chimes*—Coulson Kernahan. He hasn't yet made up his mind whether to be a critic or a poet, but he's full of fire and poetry and generous impulses." Then he introduced me to everyone, and the blind poet took my hand, his old father beamed at me benignantly and ordered a big bowl of punch in honour of the neophyte.

"It's a wonderful world you aspire to enter, my young friend," said the courtly old man. "A wonderful world, full of its own magic, full of its own joys and sorrows, joys and sorrows which are unknown to the outer world, that world which listens to us and forgets us as new lights arise. We are in it because we cannot help ourselves ; but those

of us who are true to our high calling, though they may end it in poverty and want, would not have it otherwise, for they have dreamed dreams which are more real to them than the realities around us. I wish you well."

It was a wonderful evening. Home's friend, Herbert Clarke (he lies in Highgate cemetery, a few hundred yards away, as I write) was also a poet and short-story writer, a man with quiet sardonic humour and so retentive a memory that before he wrote a story he had to sit down and forget all the other stories that ever were written.

The blind poet freely partook of the punch, and once I heard his father softly whisper to him, "Philip, Philip, do not exceed." After dinner, he attempted to recite a sonnet beginning

"I stood amid the ruins of my soul,"

but his memory failed him, and he sat down with a despairing gesture and buried his face in his hands.

The mere sight of him moved me almost to tears, so gifted, so unhappy, so alone, so much the child of cruel circumstance, pursued by malignant furies since his birth. Shortly after, he died, and his eyes opened to the light denied him on earth. Clarke's tribute to him was a very touching one :

"Thine was the poet's heart, and not alone.
As hath been seen ere now, the poet's pen.
Thou, with so many sorrows of thine own,
Forgot'st them all in those of other men.
And in their triumphs found thy joy again,
And thine applause was first and heartiest.
Thou, of all singers that the world has known
Hadst surely least of envy in thy breast,
And now thou hast what was denied thee when
We knew thee—peace and rest."

"Now," said dear old Robinson, as everyone drifted

away into the night, "you are one of us. We're giving a dinner to Barrie in a couple of months and you must be my guest. In the meantime, send in anything for *Home Chimes* that you write, and if I don't like it I'll promptly fire it back again. You must be one of my boys. I've already collected Barrie, Jerome, Kernahan, Eden Phillpotts, and a dozen others. Though the magazine doesn't pay, it helps you youngsters to train on for a generation of readers I shall never see."

It did not pay. How could it possibly pay when the circulation was so small? Barrie, Jerome, Zangwill, Kernahan, Eden Phillpotts were all finding their feet in it. It contained some of Barrie's most exquisite essays, the germs of "The Idle Thoughts of an Idle Fellow," and many things which the world afterwards welcomed when "F. W." lay dead. His last days were bothered (he never allowed anything to embitter his kindly soul) by pecuniary difficulties, and he was too proud to accept help from his struggling young friends. But Jerome and Kernahan and a few others put their heads together and persuaded him that they had obtained an order for him to write a play. A certain sum (they scraped it up among themselves) had been paid by the mythical commissioner of the play, and he must begin at once.

Robinson was very grateful to them and unsuspiciously tried to write the play. But the hand of death was on him and he could not do it. On his death-bed he realised the truth. "You've made me very happy, you dear lads," he said, "although you humbugged me. But that money was useful—very useful."

. . . . . .

I went back to my rooms in Featherstone Buildings treading on air.

CHAPTER VII

AN UNEXPECTED EDITOR

One morning, a short time after my dinner at "The Old Vagabonds," I sat wearily regarding that accursed pile of invoices. By this time they shut out my view of the graveyard; that was the only thing for which I was ever grateful to them. Their colour was blue and so was I. Even Mark Tapley could not have roused me to optimism, for the crabbed old cashier, steadily munching biscuits the while, wrote and wrote and wrote and looked at me with pained inquiry as he added his daily quota to the ever-accumulating pile. A wild impulse seized me to take the invoices, fling them on top of the fire and myself on top of them.

He came over to me and said disapprovingly, "There's a gentleman, at least I think he's a gentleman, wants to see you in office hours. Although it's against the rules of the office, you can take him into the little room at the back and tell him to go away as soon as possible;" and here he indignantly dumped another invoice on the pile.

Glad even for a moment to escape from my surroundings, I went to the railing which separated me from the outer world. "Say," drawled a good-humoured voice, "are you the man who calls himself G. B. Burgin?"

So confused was I that I was not sure of my own identity but helplessly beckoned him into the back room.

He sat down on a sample log, drew out a little machine for making cigarettes, and manufactured one. As I watched his deft, tobacco-stained fingers, it seemed to me that the heavens would fall.

"Yes," I said sadly. "I'm not sure—we can't prove anything in this world—but I think I am the person you mention."

"You've already proved one thing. Got a match?"

I humoured him with a match.

"Say, you've been in Canada?"

"Yes."

"Well, it's a darned good story—for a beginner."

"What is? Who are you? Not——?"

"I am, though, as you said just now, I can't prove it. I'm Luke Sharp, *alias*, as they say in the Police Court, Robert Barr."

"I—I didn't win that competition? Don't tell me I won it?"

"You didn't."

"Then why are you here?"

He looked round with concentrated disgust. "Why am I here? Mainly because I'd like to help dig you out of this."

"Why?"

"You're wasted here. Though that story of yours hasn't won the prize, it's good enough to buy, and my people on the other side have bought it."

I grabbed at the table edge. "Do angels smoke?"

"They don't. As a rule, it's the other fellows, where angels aren't allowed."

The cashier looked in at the door—with another invoice in his hand.

My visitor rose. "Come and see me in Holywell Street

at the *Free Press* office and we'll make friends. Like a book of mine ? "

I thanked him and he wrote my name in it. " With maladictions on a city pen." " One can't spell with a pen like this. Now I'll be off or you'll get fired. You'll always find me at the *Free Press*."

" The firm do not approve of visitors in office hours," severely said the old cashier as Robert Barr went away.

Some months later I was walking with Barr in the Strand and he began to look annoyed. " There's a man with waxed moustache, silver-headed cane and a swagger, who generally comes along at this hour, strutting in the middle of the pavement and looking not only as if he owned the earth but expected everyone else to get off it." As chance would have it, the individual in question came along at that moment just as Barr had said he would. Barr stopped in front of him, the man ceased twirling his stick and stopped in front of Barr. " Say," said Barr with his inimitable drawl, " are you anybody in particular ? " The man handed his card to Barr. " I'm Somerset's Sausages. Out of my way, feller ! " he said loftily, walked round Barr and twirled himself off.

" You'll have to stick to that city office for a bit," Barr explained after we had become friends. " Some day you can have a prayerful five minutes with that old vulture of a cashier of yours and tell him in plain Anglo-Saxon how much you love him. But go slow, or he'll work your liver out."

I did not want my anatomy to be so unpleasantly disarranged, and worked harder than ever when I ought to have been in bed. If sleep failed me, I took to sleeping-draughts. My eyes grew weaker, my waistcoat emptier, but still I " went slow." Surely the day of deliverance would one day come ?

At the next dinner of " The Old Vagabonds " I was

formally elected a member. So was another man, who returned thanks for his election in the following phrase : " I thank you, gentlemen, for admitting me to this honourable body of great men, one of whom I am now which." Our meetings were then held at the " Mitre " in Chancery Lane and were not as decorous as those when in later years we became " The New Vagabonds " and wore dress-suits and invited literary ladies to dine with us. It came to my turn to preside at the dinner (oh, the honour and glory of it !) and the waiter handed me a headless gavel with which to thump on the table.

" What's the use of this thing without a head to it ? " asked the secretary, C. N. Williamson.

" Well, sir," the waiter explained, " there was a dinner here the other night and the chairman and one of the gents had a row and the gent lost his 'ead. Then the chairman lost his 'ead and threw the gavel at the other gent, and the gavel lost its 'ead too."

Someone brought a voluble little pot-bellied man (he was supposed to hail from the States) called Hiram P. Slurke, who made many humorous speeches and professed to love us all, especially me. " What I like about you gentlemen," he explained, " is your willingness to look upon me as a brother." He gave me a big green cigar. I had never met one before and innocently smoked it until the room reeled round and I staggered to the door, down the stairs, and clung unhappily to a lamp-post.

A kindly policeman approached me. " Bit squiffey, sir ? "

I was not " squiffey," whatever that may have been, and told him so, at the same time explaining about the green cigar. Whereupon he compassionately put me on the top of a bus, and the bus kept running round me. To quote

"Eugene Aram," "All night I lay in agony," until the effect of the poisonous nicotine abated. Next morning the old cashier shook his head when he saw my pale face. For once he did not bring me any invoices.

Mr. Hiram P. Slurke was filled with sorrow at his own thoughtlessness. "I'm over here to float a great little invention of mine," he explained at our next meeting. "See here: I must have a secretary. You come to me at once. I'll write a letter to your firm explaining you're the one man I must have. We'll be a bit hustled till I get things straightened out. I've been doing business in a hair trunk for the last two years. You'll get three hundred a year and meal with me. When the hustle's over you can write your own gifted books and dedicate 'em to me, the man who loves you like a brother. Is it a deal?"

I said that it was a deal; and consented to "meal" with him. I can see him now, a very short man with bald head, jovial twinkling little grey eyes, protuberant stomach and spiky waxed moustache. He always wore a frock-coat (often he slept in it) and a tall hat, and intended to make his enemies "sit up." Privately, Mr. Hiram P. Slurke must have regarded me as an enemy, for he often made me sit up o' nights whilst he snored in drunken slumber on the sofa. "You wade in at the typewriter, son," he would say paternally, "while I gather up strength to pulverise those" (here his language became unprintable) "etceteras who're striving to steal my electric battery patent." It afterwards transpired that he had stolen it from someone else.

The head of the firm regarded me compassionately when I told him I wanted to "resign." "You know no more about the business than when you first came here; and you're always hurrying off by seven. If you want to, you can go."

I wished to explain several things to him, but thought it better not. From force of habit, he shouted to me to come and "take a letter" as I left the office.

It was not a prolonged leave-taking with the others. The cashier reluctantly gathered up my pile of uncopied invoices, and, in the intervals of biscuit munching, wished me well; the others were politely indifferent. One had sold me a watch which would not go, another had played the spy on me for the benefit of the junior partner, and a third had objected to my wanting to know how to measure timber or anything else. We parted in mutual disesteem, and I hied me joyfully to Mr. Hiram P. Slurke, who, with the assistance of two British workmen, was busily engaged in getting his new furniture into his "sweet." The other men did the hauling and he did the swearing. When the furniture was all in, he wiped his perspiring brow. "Now, boys," he said joyously, "we'll have a drink," and produced his whiskey bottle.

The whiskey bottle was perpetually in evidence for several months, and my salary fell into arrears. Fortunately, I made a little money whilst Mr. Slurke snored on the sofa. Before he

> "Folded his tents like the Arabs
> And as silently stole away"

with all he could get, he hypnotised the old woman who "did for us" into taking a frightful oath never to admit anyone to the "sweet" until he returned. The other creditors hammered at her, and the owners of the rooms serenely did nothing because they knew that the furniture (unpaid for) was worth so much, and they could distrain upon it when they liked. My judgment for arrears of salary came next in priority to them, and my one object in life, apart from writing,

was to get a sheriff's officer into those rooms. Then the landlords would take the amount due to them and there might be something left over for me.

But the old caretaker was so afraid of Mr. Hiram P. Slurke that she never gave the sheriff's officer a chance. In despair, as the value of the furniture was being slowly eaten up, I explained the situation to a friend. He went to the old woman. "See here," he said, "if by some strange forgetfulness I leave ten pounds on the table, will you be equally forgetful and leave the door of the 'sweet' open when you go up to dust at nine o'clock to-night?"

The old woman nodded, took the money, and at nine o'clock went up to dust the "sweet." By some strange chance the door was open, and my sheriff's officer slipped in after her.

Though I got some of my arrears of salary, Mr. Hiram P. Slurke was never seen again among the men who had been willing "to look upon him as a brother."

CHAPTER VIII

CANADA REVISITED

By this time, in my own estimation at least, I was an author, for I had strung together a book of short stories, although I have not dared to re-read it: it seems wiser not to do so. Then, however, as I walked along the Strand, I had visions of men nudging one another and saying in awestruck whispers, "There goes the author of——." But they did nothing of the kind, which was just as well, for I am sure that I should have walked up to them and said, "Thank you very much." And this did not arise from conceit but from sheer gratefulness that someone believed I had ever done anything, however little. In the solitude of my room I spent laborious nights writing a homely story called "Tuxter's Little Maid." The black cat approved of it, and had an extra feed when I wrote (it seemed sacrilege to type the words), "The End."

One morning I took the MS. under my arm and boldly dived into the recesses of Cassell's, La Belle Sauvage. It appeared to me that I had blundered into a rabbit-warren filled with sub-editors who darted out at me from holes in the walls, and demanded to know what I wanted. Of course I inquired for *the* editor, and they asked which one, as if they kept an assorted variety of editors in stock. I did not know which one, but was equally ready to see all of them, so they sent me to different editors who would have nothing

whatever to do with me, who, in short, "resulted and treated me with ironing." [1] At last, by some happy chance, I opened a door and found a middle-aged man sitting at a manuscript-littered table.

"What d'you want?" he growled.

"I want to see a real live editor. Are you a real live editor? The last sub-editor I met in a hole in the passage said——"

"The last what?"

"No; sub-editor."

"There aren't any sub-editors in holes in the passage."

"Well, I thought they must be, for they were almost as haughty as the personages I saw in resplendent rooms."

"They're messenger boys."

"I'm sorry. I thought they must be sub-editors at least. They have made me travel many weary miles in vain, and now, haggard and wan with fatigue (I have to get back in half an hour) I have hit upon you. Are you the editor who decides the destinies of people who write novels?"

"Yes, one of them. What can I do for you?"

"You can accept this story of mine."

"What's your name?"

"G. B. Burgin, familiarly known to his friends as G. B. B."

"Never heard of you."

"But that doesn't necessarily presuppose that you never will hear of me. You seem a little more human than the other potentates. Where can I go and be judged?"

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[1] Under the masterly management of Sir Arthur Spurgeon, callers on Cassells are better looked after now. Directly you enter the precincts of La Belle Sauvage, a nice little girl with a nice little pigtail takes you into a nice little room and finds the man you want, and there is no time wasted on either side.

He reached out a reluctant hand for the MS. "Been at the game long?"

"Some time. It's my destiny. I'm sorry, but I can't help it."

"Oh, well, hand it over. I'll see that it goes through the usual routine. Of course you think it's a great work. All you young fellows do."

"I can't have any thoughts on the subject until a great man like you sits in judgment on it. My cat approves of it. He's helped me a lot."

I had unwittingly struck the right chord, for he was interested in cats. Every really great man has some little weakness which keeps him in touch with small men. So I told him about my cat and he treated me as if I were a human being. When I rose to go (he had not asked me to take a seat but I sat down just to impress him) he actually shook hands with me, and said that in a few months I should hear from the firm. What they wanted was something unfamiliar to people, some locality which had not been written about.

I grasped the idea. "I want a holiday badly. I think I'll run over to Canada and see what I can do there. I know a little place of which the world has never heard. It has never heard of the world."

He seemed rather relieved at the distance this plan of mine would place between us, and warmly applauded my intention. "Only, don't try to imitate Gilbert Parker. He's *the* Canadian man. Try something different."

Some years later, when I was secretary to "The New Vagabonds," Sir Gilbert Parker was the chairman one evening and smilingly approached me. "I say, Burgin, I've come out without any money. Can you lend me a sovereign?"

By some rare chance, I could—and did. In the course of his speech he said that the habits of Vagabondia clung to him still, for he had been reduced to borrowing a sovereign from me. He returned it in a charming little silver match-box with the date of the dinner and our respective initials engraved in facsimile on it. But I "proticipate."

When I reached Featherstone Buildings after my interview with the editor, the black cat was nowhere to be seen and we never met again. Perhaps he thought that his mission was accomplished, that he must now return to his old haunts, the mysterious regions from which he had emerged to help and comfort me in my lonely struggles. I had lost my closest friend, the one living thing that believed in me, rejoiced with me, sorrowed with me with a more than human understanding. I have lost many friends since then, but few were ever dearer to me than that maimed and aged black cat. In some previous incarnation he must have been an author himself and so subtly helped me to become one. His empty mat on the typewriter table grieved me. Sometimes—for I still keep a vacant place there—I feign that he has returned and that when I am tired by midnight excursions into the Land of Dreams, when the phantoms conjured up become mere shadows of what they ought to be, when tired lids close down on tired eyes, he stretches out an invisible velvet paw upon the ivory keys and bids me pause. Nonsense, of course, and worse than nonsense. Still . . .

After an uneventful voyage to Canada, as I left the train at the station (they called it the depôt) opposite Four Corners, the little white houses welcomed me, robins on the cedar rail fences sang a greeting to the spring, the same little ferry-boat with the same crew, grown to manhood, waited for me. Nothing was changed and yet everything was different. I

had not told Aunt Milly or Uncle J. of my coming, for I wanted to surprise them, to walk in just as if I had come up from the newspaper office to lunch in the usual way. The wharf had a few more holes in it. I could see Mr. Mackonochie going along to the post-office, and presently there would be—Sheila! She had asked me not to write to her. If ever I came back I would find her waiting. That was all. Until then, there must be silence between us.

The same stage, with different ponies, dumped me down at the gaol door and Uncle J. came out. "Well, well," he beamed, "the dear Lord has heard my prayers and brought you back to us."

"Only for a month or six weeks," I said, flying into his outstretched arms and hugging him. "Only for a month or six weeks, Uncle J. That's all."

"Come in or everything will be cold," said a happy voice, and there was—Aunt Milly. She took me to her heart at once. "My dear boy! My dear boy! Why, you're quite a man!"

"I am," I said proudly. "I've written a book."

"Then I'll send to England and buy half a dozen copies," she fervently declared.

"It hasn't been accepted yet."

"Oh, but it will be. Somehow, I know it will be."

They did not tell me the reason for the shadow which gradually crept over their faces as we sat in the old familiar parlour afterwards. "You tell him, James. I—I haven't the heart," faltered Aunt Milly, and wept.

"The dear Lord has taken Sheila unto Himself," said Uncle J. "'The Lord giveth and the Lord taketh away. Blessed be the name of the Lord.'"

I could not say "Amen."

. . . . . .

A dull torpor succeeded those days. Then that wise old minister and true friend, Mr. Mackonochie, took me in hand. "M—— is going down to the Trappist Monastery at Mahota," he said, "and wants you to go with him. There you will see the men who have buried their sorrows, or are trying to bury them, in the service of God. It may help you."

M—— called on me the next morning. "I'm going into 'retreat' and want you to come with me."

"Going where?" I listlessly inquired.

"Into a retreat. D'you mean to tell me you've never heard of that Trappist Monastery?"

I had just heard of it from Mr. Mackonochie and was not particularly interested. "But why go there? From whom do you want to retreat?"

"From myself; and Mahota's the only place where I can do it. Come with me for a few days. You might find something there to interest you."

"Don't the monks wear horsehair shirts and all that sort of thing?"

"I don't know what you mean by 'that sort of thing'; and I'm not sure whether Trappists wear shirts at all, unless they have horsehair ones. Better come along with me and see for yourself."

And so I agreed to go with M——.

He came for me at the appointed time and helped me into his buggy. "The dear Lord comfort you," whispered Uncle J., as he tucked a rug round me to keep off the dust.

We drove off in silence. Birds sang in the trees, the river wandered at its own sweet will, but I was standing beside a grave in the green God's Acre beyond Four Corners and heeded them not.

So we went along to Mahota in the spidery-wheeled buggy drawn by two spirited little black ponies. The time was late spring. We crossed the Ottawa River in a ferry-boat, ponies, buggy and all. As we neared the opposite bank, the ponies looked on with intelligent interest and, when the barrier was withdrawn, scrambled up it like cats. Then

"All day long until 'twas eventide"

we drove beside the Ottawa, the grim Laurentian mountains on our left and shaded from the hot sun by overhanging rock elms.

The ponies trotted gaily on until we

"Came into a land
In which it seemed always afternoon. . . .
And the charmed sunset linger'd low adown
In the red West."

Picture to yourself a barren, sandy valley nearly midway between Ottawa and Montreal. About forty or fifty years ago, half a dozen Trappists entered into possession there. No one else wanted it, and, after building a little shanty in which to shelter themselves, they set to work. In the space of twenty years they had erected a stately monastery and converted this barren waste into a fruitful Paradise, with herds and horses, vineyards and fertile fields. On finding that Montreal eagerly purchased their fruit and vegetables, they sent to Switzerland for an expert cheese-maker and their numbers gradually swelled to a hundred.

As we drew up before the monastery, in answer to our subdued knock on the great iron door a young monk opened it and silently beckoned us to enter. We at once plunged

into mediævalism and beguiled the time by reading the inscriptions on the walls :

"S'il est dur de vivre à Mahota il est doux d'y mourir."

"Une Eternité de bonheur."

"Être avec Jésus est un doux Paradis."

"Être sans Jésus est un dur Enfer."

The white-robed, sandalled monk brought us a book in which to write our names. Though he was allowed to speak to travellers, he silently pointed to the numbers of our respective rooms, and gravely led the way to the refectory, with its big crucifix at the opposite end. A small table covered by a parti-coloured cloth stood in the middle of the stone floor. There was a pitcher of water in the centre of the table and an oak form on each side of it. As soon as we had seated ourselves, the brother brought us some cold meat, a huge loaf, and a bowl of very good butter. Then he divided a bottle of the monastery wine between us, rather rough and sour, but not wholly unpalatable, and stood with folded hands awaiting our pleasure.

Our bedrooms were about ten feet square, plainly but neatly furnished, with electric lights and the customary pious mottoes on the whitewashed walls. A big printed placard set forth that only those were welcome to this house of God who sought it to live in peace, silence, and the solitude of penitence. We were tired and went to bed early, but were awakened at midnight by the clanging of the monastery bell summoning the monks to their three hours' service.

After the first day as we lounged about the monastery grounds we gradually began to experience a disinclination

to talk, and silence soon ceased to be a deprivation to us. The monks we met were unaware of our presence ; even the fowls wore a look at once pensive and demure : there was no idle frisking or clarion-calling among them. The only sign of tenderness I saw during my stay at the monastery was when one very old monk furtively picked up an aged rabbit which lay basking in the sun, kissed it, and then, as if ashamed of having been betrayed into showing an interest in something without a soul, pottered away.

When the monks were not walking in the fields or praying, they had an hour's mid-day rest, and painted missals or walked with noiseless sandals up and down a long stone corridor. Each seemed to be apart from the others, as if it were wrong to have any human affection for his fellows. Some of them had very beautiful faces ; some very ugly ones ; some looked as if they were perpetually wrestling with the devil ; the eyes of a few were perfectly blank. They were of this world yet had renounced it and all its cares ; and they ceaselessly prayed for the toiling millions without the monastery walls.

One night I went to the midnight service, and, greatly to my surprise, the monks chanted lustily. Bringing up the rear of the long procession filing into the chapel was a little fellow of about twelve, dressed exactly like the others ; in short, a juvenile replica of them. His drunken parents ill-used him, drove him out into the snow of the bitter winter's night, and the abbot on going his rounds found him curled up outside the monastery door. He took the waif in his arms, fed him by the kitchen fire, warmed and comforted him, and the boy remained in the monastery. He did not want to go back to his parents, had no wish to mingle with the world, in time would become a monk. It was his own choice, his vocation.

As I watched the little fellow and the influence of the monastery permeated my being, I began to regard him with compassion. Gradually, he became the germ of a novel called "The Shutters of Silence." I had to invent a story to account for his presence in the monastery, make him grow up to seventeen or eighteen, and, before taking the final vows, be offered the opportunity of going into the world to see what it was like, with the option of returning to the monastery if the world did not appeal to him. Day by day he unconsciously appealed to me, with the result that I began my story, sent him into the world, gradually awakened him to a knowledge of it, and then gave him the choice, after his falling in love with a sweet English girl, of returning to the monastery or for ever abandoning it. In the story he learns that he is illegitimate, and returns to the monastery, but meets the girl again and does not re-enter it. That was the bare outline of the plot, and the story so possessed me that I wrote it in six weeks. It was little or no trouble to write it, for there were the facts before me; the sombre atmosphere of the monastery had become part of me; I felt it and, after the manner of the monks, would not have objected to help dig my own grave. When they thought that they had failed to live up to their standard, each took a mattock and deepened his last resting-place in the little flower-strewn graveyard. And as they dug, the big bell boomed out a warning of mortality to their dull ears. Their food cost a halfpenny a day; they never tasted meat, but lived on bread and fruit and vegetables and drank water only.

The curious thing about it was that the monastery walls cut off all desire to mingle with the outer world. The outer world became a fussy, obtrusive, stupid kind of place with bills to pay, a certain uninteresting routine which wasted

one's time and prevented one from leaning up against a tree in the monastery garden and waiting for the end of all things. Love, hate, all human passions were not. One lived the life of a cabbage, with the exception of a desire to save the souls of all men; I do not know whether women were also supposed to stand in need of salvation. Like the cabbage, each monk would decay and be put aside, more reverently than if he were a vegetable, but dropped, in his robes, into the grave which he had dug with his own hands, and so pass on to—what? Where they were to pass on to did not trouble the monks. They thought they knew.

There was one humble brother who peeled the monastery potatoes. In summer he sat outside the kitchen peeling his potatoes: in winter he peeled them inside the kitchen. One day an inspiration came to him, and he invented a kind of knife which peeled potatoes more quickly than any other kind of knife. He laid his invention on the High Altar and went on peeling potatoes with the old knife. When I wrote a reverent little story about him and his faithfulness in a small thing, no editor would print it and I have often vainly asked myself why. After all, to peel potatoes better than anyone else is to have achieved something. One editor said that potatoes did not accord with monasticism; another thought that the British public could peel its own potatoes sufficiently well for all practical purposes and did not want to be told how to improve upon the ordinary methods. But, for the life of me, I cannot help thinking that the story had something in it. If an editor could have seen that sweet-faced old monk hunched up on the stone step and peeling his potatoes from morn till dewy eve, he might dimly have realised all the heroism, the uncomplaining patience, the fortitude involved in devoting one's life to the doing of an insignificant

thing because it was the one thing given him to do. My own experience with a good many editors is that if you write an original story, something out of the beaten track, it frightens them. They say, "Yes, yes, very nice, but our readers aren't used to this sort of thing," and so back it comes to the writer.

In Constantinople the turkey sellers bring their turkeys from outlying villages for a distance of fifty or sixty miles, and drive them about the streets until they are all sold. At night the turkey man pens the birds in a corner, lays his crook on the ground in front of them, and they "stay put." He wraps himself in his cloak and sleeps on the other side of the crook.

One of these men told me that a hen turkey made a nest in a street corner and began to lay eggs. He fed her, sold off the rest of the flock and waited for the eggs to hatch. A pretty Turkish girl looked through the harem lattice every day and fell in love with him. Her father reluctantly consented to their marriage on condition that the turkey brought off a fine brood of chicks. At the appointed time the eggs all proved to be addled. The girl found it out, comforted her despairing lover, and, unknown to him, bought a dozen newly-hatched young turkeys. With the assistance of an old nurse, when her lover slept she removed the bad eggs from the nest and substituted the chicks, and she and her turkey man "lived happy ever after."

It seemed to me a charming little story, but whether I spoiled it in the telling or not, I do not know, for I sent it to twenty-seven editors before it "stuck," and it must have travelled almost as many miles as the original turkeys.

Some six months after we left the Trappist Monastery (it had taken twenty years to build) it was burned down in

twenty minutes. A monk had been ironing the seams of a robe and put down his hot iron near a heap of shavings. He went away to say his prayers and the monastery caught fire. It was a bitterly cold winter's day, with all the water frozen in the wells. The flames mounted higher and higher until they reached the big bell. In silence, the monks tried to pass buckets of water to each other from a well in the yard which by some chance remained unfrozen. Snow began to fall, and the monks, the abbot at their head, and preceded by a brother carrying a huge golden cross, formed into twos and walked slowly away to a farm belonging to them over the crest of the hill. The boom of the bell dropping from its supports sounded solemnly as the last monk rose against the skyline and disappeared.

Twice since then has the monastery been burned down, and I hope that it will not happen again, for I have an odd fancy that some day when I am very tired of the world, and the world is equally tired of me, I should like to creep back there and await—Nirvana !

The aggravating part of it all was that I could not rest until I had finished my book. It wrote itself in six weeks and I had very little to do with it. And now nice young interviewers ask, " How long did it take you ? " They fail to understand that an author is little more than a living telephone tempered by chance ; that some unexpected thing happens to him, turns itself into a book and is transmitted through the author-telephone. If the telephone is in an interesting place, it transmits interesting stories. Perhaps the most disconcerting thing to an author is when he writes what he imagines to be a serious book and some one who has glanced at the cover says that it " deals with the author's customary happy-hunting-grounds " and is " very frolicksome."

Serves him right, however, for presuming to invent stories when the great Book of Nature is always before his unreceptive eyes.

. . . . . .

I said good-bye to Aunt Milly and Uncle J. Aunt Milly whispered to me at parting: "I know Cassells will publish your book."

I had forgotten all about it. That was why she reminded me. I was not a human being but merely a machine for the production of fiction—fiction with a little truth in it. So I went back to England to—write books!

CHAPTER IX

THE "IDLER" MAGAZINE

My novel, "Tuxter's Little Maid," came out, and, owing to mildly commendatory Press criticisms, I was afraid would soon go in again. But I underrated the book's vitality, for, like *Charley's Aunt*, it is still running. Few of my friends appeared to be aware that there was such a book. One old lady wrote to say (I was sure that she must have been an old lady) that a young man who began his literary career by scoffing at "dissenting bodies" would not only lose his own body but his soul as well. For the life of me, I could not see what she meant, as the book did not attack any religious denomination. She wrote to me from time to time and I preserved a discreet silence. At last there came from her a most charming letter in which she confessed that she had written the letters because she "wanted to draw my autograph." I felt very like Anthony Trollope who, when he was a post-office functionary, was sent to Ireland to investigate the complaints of an old gentleman who wrote twice a week to the head office. After a long wet journey on a jaunting car, Trollope arrived at his destination and was fervently received by the old gentleman, entertained by him most hospitably, and when Trollope had to depart the next morning he naïvely confessed that he had invented his complaints just to keep himself busy.

I was invited to read extracts from "Tuxter" at a young

men's meeting at Finsbury Park, but was so nervous and read so badly that the audience went to sleep.

The worst was to come. One day I received a formal missive from Messrs. Cassell & Co. saying that Mr.—— wished to see me about my book. I was ushered into the presence of a white-bearded benevolent-looking old gentleman who received me very cordially and said that, much as he admired the book, he was afraid that there was "not enough devil in it." Of course, I offered to read up "Paradise Lost" and put as much devil in it as he considered necessary, but, as he was unable to fix the requisite amount of devil, we left matters where they were.

"Free lancing" was an arduous business and not particularly remunerative. I had met Jerome K. Jerome several times, and wrote to say that I wanted to interview him for a paper. He appointed an hour, and the interview progressed swimmingly until he asked me what paper it was to appear in and I had to confess that I did not know. Whereupon, he gently but firmly pointed out that such a proceeding would do him a great deal of harm and that nothing but my ignorance of journalistic etiquette could excuse my action. I agreed and tore up the interview with many apologies.

"Stop a bit," he said, as I took up my hat. "How would you like to put in three days a week with me as my secretary? That will give you plenty of time to do other things."

How would I like! I jumped at it. When, a few weeks later, I met Robert Barr and told him of this kindness on Jerome's part, he hauled me into his den at the *Free Press* office. "You're just the man I wanted to introduce me to Jerome. I'm thinking of starting a new monthly and if he'll go in with me you shall be the sub-editor."

They met and arranged the whole affair in December, 1891. Until we could get suitable offices, we borrowed a room from the *Free Press*. There were to be serials by Mark Twain and Bret Harte, and an "Idlers' Club" wherein we could hold forth on any subject that appealed to us. As Robert Barr wrote in the first number:

"We hope to be the means of bringing before the public youthful talent. We have an eye for the discovery of youthful talent. Why, take this very first number of ours. Who do you find in it? Mark Twain, Bret Harte, James Payn, Andrew Lang. You say these men are unknown. Maybe. But it will not be for long. I tell you we mean to make those names famous wherever the English language is spoken—even brokenly. I predict—and am not like some prophets who reserve their predictions until after the event—that all these writers will leave their mark upon the literature of the day—especially Twain. I have real hopes of Twain. I met him awhile ago, and he talked so entertainingly that I took him aside and asked him why he didn't try to write something funny. He seemed staggered by the boldness of the idea, but finally consented to try. The result will be found in the first pages of the *Idler*. It was the same way with young Bret Harte. He sat and told us his adventures. They were many and marvellous. I thought it a pity that such a talent for fiction should be wasted, so I drew him into a corner and whispered, "Why don't you try to write a story?" He, too, was surprised at the suggestion. He said he didn't like. But I persuaded him. So it was with the others. I goaded them on to write, and I am convinced they will never regret it."

Dudley Hardy designed a frontispiece for the "Idlers' Club"—chairs in front of a fire, one man with his feet on the mantelpiece, and all of them smoking. It was reduced to fit the size of the page, and the original, which is about a yard long, is still in my possession. The "Idlers' Club" proved to be one of the most popular features in the magazine and everybody was anxious to contribute to it. One day a man came into the office and confessed that he was "down on his uppers." Could I give him something to do? I suggested that he might try the "Idlers' Club" and he did. Then he disappeared. Some years later, I was walking past the Savoy Hotel when

this same man met me. "Now," said he, "I can keep my oath."

I asked him to explain what I had to do with it.

"You see, when I came to you that day at the *Idler* I was stony broke. No one wanted any of my work, and you gave me a chance. Now I'm making two thousand a year with sanguinary serials. I vowed that if I ever succeeded you should lunch with me at the Savoy. So come along."

I went along, and it seemed to me that he spent the greater part of a year's income in giving me that lunch.

Curiously enough, a rumour spread abroad that we were "New Humorists." We did not know what it meant, we had not thought of it ourselves, but one section of the Press became bitterly hostile at our not being content to model ourselves on the "Old Humour." We were presumptuous young idiots who would run our little course and end in a pauper's funeral. But, as Jerome said, he wanted humour at any age, and when the veteran W. L. Alden joined our ranks, it was a standing joke to introduce him as one of the youthful band. Among the "presumptuous young idiots" who were to have their bones rattled over the stones were Zangwill, Eden Phillpotts, Barry Pain, Frank Mathew, Arthur Conan Doyle, Coulson Kernahan, E. W. Hornung, and many others.

Once a week we gave afternoon tea to contributors, at that time a startling and new-humorous novelty. The refreshments consisted of tea and cake—cake in slabs—and bread and butter. Jimmy, the little office-boy who wanted to be a prize-fighter, handed round the tea, which was prepared in the back office by an elderly female with black-beetles in her bonnet. Someone said they were "bugles" but the majority inclined to the beetle theory. This was after we

had moved to Arundel Street, and everyone crowded to us. One afternoon the press grew so great that Jimmy lost his nerve. He particularly disliked any allusion to his diminutive size. When one old lady said to him, "Little boy, I want some more tea," the usual suavity of this would-be Carpentier forsook him. "You can't 'ave none," he said firmly. "You've 'ad three cups already." The lift boy who ushered in the visitors told Jimmy that "If it wasn't for the pretty ladies as comes 'ere I'd chuck it." Modern financiers were not in it with this youngster's artful schemes for raising money. One day he informed me that Jerome had no sympathy—not real sympathy. "How's that?" "Well, sir, I told him I'd dropped my last shilling down a grating and asked his advice, and he said if he was me he'd go down the grating and stay there till he found it."

This same youth one day asked me to lend him something to read, so I hastily threw him a magazine out of which I had cut a story of my own. In five minutes he sorrowfully reappeared. "'Tain't no good to me, sir, that ain't," he said dejectedly. "Your story ain't in it. You couldn't lend me a bob to carry on with, sir?"

One afternoon a very tattered and bibulous lady (she said she was a real lady, so I suppose she must have been) came in and wanted me to accept some vermin-infested MS. which she had probably picked out of a neighbouring dustbin. When I declined to touch it, she said, "All right, then. Lend me sixpence to go to Paris with, there's a dear, good, kind young man. Anyone can see from your noble face how kind-hearted you are." The amount seemed so reasonable for such a long journey that I lent her the sixpence and she departed for Paris *via* the public-house round the corner. Two hours later she came in again and said Paris

was so expensive that she wanted another sixpence to pay her return fare.

But she was mildness itself when compared with the long-haired maniac who pushed me into a corner of the office (he had a big club in his hand), produced a MS., and said, "You print this at once or I'll knock out your brains." I pretended to look at the MS. whilst wondering how I could escape.

"You print it at once," he repeated, "or out go your brains."

"I should be delighted to do it," I explained (the article was called "If Christ came to Fleet Street"), "but you really ought to take it to the *Sporting World*. They've so much more influence in religious circles than we have. Jimmy, look up the address of the *Sporting World* for this gentleman." He shook hands cordially, and departed.

The next morning, just as I reached the office, Phil May, the *Punch* artist, appeared. He looked very sad, for we had kept the magazine waiting for some sketches which he had promised to do and it had to appear at the last moment without them. Jerome had sent a red-hot letter to him on this breach of faith. Hence his call. "Is he about anywhere?" he asked, nervously shifting his portfolio from one hand to the other and preparing for instant flight.

"Fortunately for you, he isn't."

Phil May produced Jerome's letter and re-read it. Then he drew out a wonderful sketch from his portfolio—a sketch which represented an enormous-footed Jerome kicking him out of the office. "D'you think this would make some amends if I were to give it him?"

"You can try if you like to come in later; it's a bit dangerous."

He read the letter again—"shuffling, unreliable man who

can't keep his word"—and became very indignant. "You like this sketch? Is it a good sketch?"

"It's a very good sketch."

"You're right. So it is. I'm d—d if I give a sketch like this to a man who wrote me a letter like that"; and he bolted out of the office.

When he was not hard at work, Robert Barr had a habit of yarning to his friends. During these moments of relaxation, he invented wonderful plots for books on the spur of the moment, kept up a sustained narrative full of thrilling incidents, and ten minutes afterwards completely forgot all about them. I was sitting at my desk one afternoon when he was unusually brilliant with a plot for a long novel which he one day intended to write. As he went along from chapter to chapter, I carefully jotted down the whole thing in shorthand and typed it out later. There must have been three or four thousand words. Some weeks afterwards I humbly approached him. "I've a great favour to beg of you."

He regarded me suspiciously. "Well, what is it?"

"You see, plots aren't my strong point—not really my strong point—but I think I've hit upon a good one at last. It occurred to me that if you're not busy—not unusually busy—that——"

"I'm always busy."

"But if you're not quite so busy as usual, perhaps you wouldn't mind letting me bore you with this plot of mine. There seems to be a loose link somewhere—something that doesn't quite fit. I don't know where, but——"

"That's very probable."

"It is. But—but I thought that with your keen insight into human nature, you might——"

Barr swung his chair round. "See here. You've wasted ten minutes of my valuable time trying to get out that you want me to overhaul your confounded plot. Is that it?"

"Ye—es; that's it, if you will be so kind."

"Then why couldn't you say so at first instead of stammering away there all this time? It's the sort of injury one expects from a friend. All right; only don't do it again or I will slay you with much slaughter. And don't age me more than you can help. I'll give you ten minutes. Fire away, and I'll promise not to interrupt."

I thanked him more timidly than before and began to read out his own plot to him. As I read, his mouth opened, his cigarette fell out, and he was so surprised that he did not stoop to pick it up again. Then he swore softly to himself but did not interrupt me until I reached the end.

"I beg your pardon," he gasped at last. "I didn't think you had it in you."

"I hadn't."

"Hadn't what?"

"Hadn't that plot in me. When I heard you telling it to your friends I took it down in shorthand. Here's your property."

He clutched it eagerly. "You lunch with me to-day—lunch sumptuously," he said gratefully. "It's just the sort of thing I've been trying to think of and can't."

We had published some interesting interviews with literary celebrities in the *Idler*. Barr thought they were a bit overdone and was growing rather tired of them. "I'll tell you what we ought to do," he said one day. "You go and interview Bret Harte. I'll do one also. Yours shall be 'The Real Interview'; I'll do 'The Ideal Interview,' and we'll have some fun over it."

Here is an extract from my interview with Bret Harte. I give it because it explains what follows :

"I sat talking to a military-looking man clad in a fashionably cut morning suit of grey cloth. An irreproachable pin glistened in his dark tie. His hair was iron-grey, the heavy drooping moustache a little darker, face oval, eyes clear, grey, humorous, shrewd, penetrating; height above the medium; figure trim, with broad, square shoulders. He wore an eyeglass; and there was a delightfully polished man-of-the-world air about him—the appearance of one who is equally at home in a wigwam or a palace."

This was Robert Barr's portrait of the same individual, Bret Harte :

"As I neared the cabin, a sharp voice shouted, 'Throw up your hands.' At the turn in the path, I saw a man apparently with one eye, gazing at me along the gleaming barrel of a rifle. It may seem weakness on my part, but I instantly complied with his request.

'Are ye heeled?' was his next question.

Not quite understanding the inquiry, I replied that I had footed it up the mountain, if that was what he meant.

After a little discussion, during which, fortunately for me, his rifle did not go off, I told him that I had merely come to see Mr. Bret Harte, and talk with him about his work.

'Put it thar, stranger,' he said, holding out his hand. 'I'm your man.'

The celebrated writer wore a slouch hat. His shirt was red and open at the throat. His trousers were partly shoved into the tops of his cowhide boots. From a leathern belt round his waist depended a revolver or two, a sheathed knife and other ornaments of a like nature."

A few days after the magazine appeared containing our articles side by side, I went into Barr's room and found him gazing at a letter. "Well, I'm everlastingly d——d," he said, handing me the letter. "Read this."

It was a letter in a lady's handwriting, thanking him for his wonderful portrait of Bret Harte and saying that she had always known that he, Bret Harte, would be just like that.

People have often asked me whether interviewers are a public nuisance, even with imaginary interviews. Sometimes

it is a curse to be an interviewer. Then the public curse, too. At other times it is an unalloyed delight. I began to interview literary lions and lionesses from sheer love for them and the desire which every young literary aspirant has to be in touch with the heads of his profession. But I had to know all about them, to sympathise with their work, or the interview was a failure. A successful interviewer must be either singularly sensitive or utterly callous.

Many of my literary friendships date from the time when I timidly knocked at the doors of my "subjects." With the knowledge born of experience, I afterwards became aware that my fears were groundless, owing to the simple fact that the interview had been properly arranged for and in no instances were the victims taken by surprise. That is essential. An interviewer has no more business to take his "subjects" by surprise than one stranger has to pick the pocket of another stranger. It does not give the "subject" time to arrange either his ideas or his furniture.

A great deal of nonsense is talked about the sanctity of literary life. One feels inclined to say with Lord Arthur Pomeroy, "What rot!" A successful man always has something to say worth listening to—especially a successful literary man. His skeletons hang in their cupboards; he does not drag them forth for the interviewer to batten upon; and, very frequently, he has some pet fad of which he is dying to tell the world. In comes that beneficent being the interviewer, and the thing is done. The one great rule in interviewing is always to give your "subject" the "copy" to correct. With the very best intentions in the world, you may make some mistake in a matter of fact or opinion, or say something which the "subject" did not mean to let slip out, and cannot be recalled unless he sees the interview.

The aggravating part of submitting your interview to the "subject" is that he invariably knocks out the most interesting experience, the best anecdote, the most striking incident. That is one of the trials to which an interviewer has to submit before he can become purged from earthly dross.

To write a really good interview takes every ounce out of a man, especially when he is not relying on shorthand notes. My first interview with a member of the opposite sex was with Mrs.—— the *doyenne* of the literary world. At first she refused to be interviewed. "Mrs.—— is the most interesting woman in London. Try again," said my chief. She wrote back, "As you make the matter a personal one, please come and see me." I went with fear and trembling, and she interviewed me. Then I received permission to interview her. It was the most gracious, the tenderest consideration I ever received. Her experience helped my inexperience; she led me gently over rough ways and craggy paths until my task was done. I do not interview people now, and I have been interviewed myself. "Just about four anecdotes, early struggles two pars, first accepted story one ditto, and we'll shove it into the paper before your story comes out," said the unabashed interviewer. "Then we can go to lunch."

"My dear sir," once wrote a friendly stranger, "I daresay you would like to interview me, so, in order to save trouble, enclose an interview already done. Will you dine with me *after* it appears?" By some strange chance, that interview fell into the wastepaper basket.

If the interviewer loves his work and interviews a man in whom everyone is interested, he is an undoubted blessing. When I think of the men I have met in this way, and what a soul-enlarging, horizon-widening experience it is to sit and

talk with the kings of the craft, it hurts me to think that there are so many "subjects" who "have not arrived," who are equally great yet vainly wait for the footstep on their uncarpeted stair of that Herald of Fame who puts them in touch with their public and often secures them bread and cheese. The late Bennett Coll (his real name was the Rev. A. Giles, and he wrote, among many other things, a well-known pamphlet called "My Churchwardens") once said to me: "If you know any struggling young author who is having an especially hard time of it, send him for a month to my Devon rectory and I'll pay his fare both ways. 'Darteymoor' will soon brush away the cobwebs and make a new man of him." I sent him a young friend of mine to whom the gods had been unkind, and he was as good as his word. He once wrote to me:

"I be a Zummerzet mahn, you mind, an' wawnee 'pon a time, I were used vor to sing:

> 'An' zim aw I vancy as zummer be nigh,
> Vor 'ere aw declaare be a bloo-bottle vly.'

Swate zong 'e wur, too. It wur a friend o' mine as wur kin'ly axed to kitch 'old of a bumble-bee, cos 'em didn't stingee this month. Wull, 'er holdth on to wawm f'ra bit, an' then 'er zaith, 'Lor-da-massy,' 'er zaith, 'ow dommed 'ot his voot be!'"

And then again, in answer to a petulant outburst of mine:

> "This grand old world of ours is but a child:
> Yet in the go-cart. Patience: give it time
> There is a hand that guides."

The *Idler* wanted a poem by Swinburne, who was jealously guarded by Theodore Watts-Dunton. Someone hinted that the surest way to get a poem from Swinburne was to ask Watts-Dunton for one of his own and then suggest

Swinburne as an afterthought. Watts-Dunton was a remarkable man who by dint of reclaiming great men from their vices, and living with them, had persuaded himself that he also was a great man. He was a great critic but he was not a really great poet, and William Sharp confessed to me that he was much amused when he interviewed both Watts-Dunton and Swinburne at Putney, and Watts-Dunton insisted on being photographed reading a book at a window on the ground floor whilst Swinburne did the same from a window above.

I met Watts-Dunton one day and he asked me to lunch at The Pines : he was very particular about the time I ought to be there, as Swinburne did not like to be kept waiting for his food. I eagerly accepted the invitation. If the hounds of spring had been on my traces, I would not have minded them one bit, provided they did not pull me down before I met the great poet.

The Pines, from the outside, struck me as the essence of suburban respectability and dulness, rather gloomy and depressing.

As I reached there, I met Watts-Dunton coming out. He had evidently forgotten all about his invitation to me, and profusely apologised when I said I would go back to town with him. "Nonsense!" he exclaimed. "You must see Swinburne. Come in, and I'll introduce you to my sister, and of course you'll stay to lunch."

He did. Then he departed Londonward and I went into lunch with Miss Watts.

It was a Victorian dining-room, which had got up early in the Victorian period. But the walls were hung with magnificent pictures by Rossetti, and in studying them one forgot the other furniture. Presently, after we had seated

ourselves, the door opened, Swinburne glided in, nervously shook hands with me, and we began to lunch.

The menu consisted of roast shoulder of mutton and "pudden," both very good in their way, although they hardly came up to my ideal of poetic fare. In front of Swinburne was a big tumbler and a bottle of beer. He unscrewed the stopper, or pulled out the cork, and poured the beer with loving care into the tumbler, his eyes lighting up with fervent anticipation. Then he took a gulp of the beer, and his features became convulsed as he put down the tumbler and hissed out the one word "Flat!"

Miss Watts was evidently not surprised, for she calmly surveyed the agitated poet and rang the bell. When the maid appeared she pointed to the beer and mildly remarked, "Jane! Flat!"

Jane did not appear to be surprised either, for she took the bottle, gave an indignant toss of her head, left the room, and returned with a fresh bottle and tumbler.

This time the beer was all that the other bottle should have been, and Swinburne drank it with evident enjoyment. Miss Watts addressed one or two remarks to him, which he answered in monosyllables, and then devoted himself to the mutton and "pudden" with a very decent appetite, from time to time nervously regarding me from one corner of his eye. Although I longed to tell him that I was more afraid of him than he could possibly be of me, I dared not do so, and when the meal was finished he hastily got up and disappeared.

There was nothing very distinctive about him. To use an Americanism, "his upper chest had slipped a little," and he had beautiful hands. Had I seen him in a restaurant and not known who he was I should have taken him for a prosperous tradesman. He was very deaf, too, although his shyness

may have made him take refuge in this method of escape from talking to a man of whom he had never heard. Miss Watts made a very charming hostess, but the most abiding impression I retained of my visit was the magnificent solidity of the mutton and "pudden."

One day Sir Arthur Conan Doyle came into the *Idler* office. We were publishing "The Stark-Munro Letters," which contained a good deal of the theological doubts of a very young man. The editors thought that, for the serial issue of the story, these theological digressions might be cut down, and the author reluctantly consented to go through the alterations with me. Of course, there was no doubt that, viewed from the standpoint of the story, any curtailment did spoil its unity; but serial readers are an impatient folk whose constant cry is, "Cut the cackle and come to the 'osses," and so, in deference to their unreasonable requirements, the story was cut down, and I lunched at the Reform Club with Sir Arthur when the painful operation was over. Both William Black and Barrie came over to speak to him.

Silas K. Hocking was kind enough to tell me a few days ago how he suggested to Sir Arthur, when he was growing tired of Sherlock Holmes, the best way of killing him off.

"My wife and I," said Silas Hocking, "were staying at the Riffel Alp Hotel. I don't remember the year, but the month was August. Conan Doyle was there and E. F. Benson and the Archbishop his father. Doyle introduced me to Benson and we took a number of rambles together. One day Doyle and Benson and others started to climb the Matterhorn. I did not join them, but contented myself with getting a glimpse of them now and then through a telescope. On a less tiring journey I availed myself of their company. We did not often talk shop. At this time Sherlock Holmes

was in the zenith of his glory, and the popularity of 'Dodo' had not begun to wane.

"One day we started out with a guide to a neighbouring glacier. It was a pleasant walk, mainly through pine woods, up hill and down dale till we found ourselves at the foot of the glacier with its summit looming high above us. It was my first attempt at climbing a wall of ice, and I did not find it particularly easy, as the steps, dug out with an ice axe, were narrow and slippery. However, by stooping and gripping each other's hands, we managed to edge our way up step by step until we reached the top, and then started on our walk along its back, dodging boulders and pools and fearsome cracks. I don't know how we began to talk about Sherlock Holmes. I think it was Benson who introduced the subject.

"Said Doyle, in his breezy, jocular way: 'Oh, I intend to put an end to him.'

"'You don't seriously mean that?' Benson questioned.

"'I do indeed,' he answered.

"'I think I'd hesitate before doing that,' I interposed. 'He must have been a good friend to you.'

"'Oh, I don't deny that,' he laughed, 'but the fact is he's become a sort of nightmare—an old man of the sea about my neck. If I don't kill him soon he'll kill me.'

"We had reached by this time a yawning crevasse which had to be negotiated, and as we stood on its brink looking down into the greeny-blue depths I said to Doyle, 'If you have determined to put an end to Holmes you might do worse than bring him out to Switzerland and drop him down a crevasse. It would save funeral expenses, anyhow.'

"'Not a bad idea,' he laughed. 'I'll have to think about it.' And then the subject dropped.

"Whether my suggestion had anything to do with the ultimate fate of Sherlock Holmes or not, I don't know.

"Certain it is that Doyle did bring him out to Switzerland, but instead of dropping him down a crevasse he dropped him over the Reichenbach falls, which was quite as effective and slightly more picturesque."

. . . . . .

"R. L. S." was one of our contributors, and, although I never had the felicity of meeting Robert Louis Stevenson in the flesh, his friend and agent Charles Baxter was an old friend of mine. One day Baxter wrote to my friend William Archbaldtelling him that he had awhole boxful of unpublished Stevenson letters which he had presented to the Savile Club on condition that Archbald and I were to be allowed to inspect them and pick out one letter for myself and two for Archbald.

We went down to the Savile Club and the box was brought out for our delighted inspection. Archbald started on one half of the letters and I started on the other half. Presently Archbald heaved a sigh of deep satisfaction. "I've found a tremendously long letter all about a lease. I'll take that." He selected another on somewhat similar grounds. Then he wanted to know what I had chosen. "One of the very best and most characteristic letters Stevenson ever wrote," I said. "Read it."

He read it, but preferred his own about the lease. I meant to publish the letter I selected, but there were difficulties about the copyright and so I can only quote: "The future is a fine thing in its way, and, what's more, it's all we have to come and go upon."

CHAPTER X

TRIALS OF A SUB-EDITOR

It is a proud and glorious thing to be a sub-editor, almost as great as being an editor, except that the sub does most of the work and when anything goes wrong gets all the blame. By this time I knew a great many writing men and most of the dear, delightful haunts of Fleet Street. A man who has never smelt roasting chestnuts in Fleet Street on a chill December afternoon cannot truthfully be said to have lived—that is, really lived.

One morning I was astonished to get a letter from a man on a country paper saying that if I would take his stories for the *Idler* he would take mine for his journal——, a case of distinct bribery and corruption. I silently handed the letter to Barr, who read it with a grim smile. "If you hadn't shown me that letter and I had chanced to see it, your days would not have been long in the land of the *Idler*."

In a preliminary sense, I had to deal with the various MSS. submitted for consideration. If I read and returned them the same day, the contributor was sure that they had not been read at all. If I kept them a week, the contributor indignantly wrote to know the cause of the delay. Many and various were the traps laid for my unwary feet in order that the contributor might ascertain whether his or her MS. had been read. When I opened a MS., I made it a rule to turn over every page to see whether one had been purposely

put in upside down or two slightly gummed together. If I had a good morning, I generally found some little beads which the writer of the MS., evidently a woman, had put into its folds in order to discover whether I had really looked at it. If any of the beads were missing, the presumption was that the MS. had received some attention. Jimmy, the office-boy, and I would count the beads, make them up into a neat little packet, and, if the MS. were no good, return them with it. Another trick was for a woman to fasten a long golden hair—it was always golden, sometimes suspiciously golden—across a page in the middle of the MS. That was also, with some difficulty, made into a neat little packet. I secured small envelopes from a neighbouring chemist for this purpose. In other MSS. the last or the second page was purposely omitted. One man, who had turned three pages upside down, put a little note in the margin: "If you really get as far as this, I apologise." It was a good story.

The first page of a story generally told its own tale, but, to make sure, I conscientiously read on, selected the MSS. which I thought my chiefs might care to see, and told Jimmy to keep the wreckage a couple of days before sending it back. The work at length became so arduous that I was given a deputy sub who, although he was neither the greatest nor the wisest of mankind, was most certainly the meanest. "You say," he informed me one day, "I never do a generous thing. Now I am going to tell you of a very generous thing I did this morning."

I expressed myself delighted at his reformation.

"You know Smithson, the artist who bolted to America with a—a buxom female who was not his wife, and left a wife and child to starve?"

"Yes. What of him?"

"It was very wet this morning and the poor woman—drenched—came in with her lovely little girl. She explained that her only means of livelihood was to let the child sit as a model to artists for an infant St. John, and all that sort of thing."

"Well?"

"It wasn't well. Don't be so impatient. She asked me to lend her some money, and I refused."

"Of course. You would."

"Though I make it a rule never to lend money, she looked so cold and hungry that I felt sorry for her and asked her if she would like a cup of tea."

"I apologise."

"I thought you would. You may remember that the office-boy does a lucrative business by selling you cups of tea in the afternoon, so I discovered his tea-caddy (he was out at lunch) and made them each a cup. It occurred to me that they were hungry. I went to Mr. Jerome's room and found his tin of fancy biscuits. I gave them two each and they were very happy and thankful, although I think that they would have preferred three each. Now, do I never do a good action?"

"I never said that you were not capable of doing a kind action at someone else's expense."

A fortnight later, Jerome asked me: "Seen my tin of biscuits?"

I had not. Then I remembered and went to my sub. "Where are the rest of Mr. Jerome's biscuits?"

He looked a little confused. "I'm very sorry. I meant to return them but the temptation was too much for me and I ate them myself."

"And you've gained half a pound of biscuits for doing a kind action. You'd better buy Mr. Jerome a fresh supply."

"Is it absolutely necessary? We are all liable to moments of temptation."

"Absolutely necessary. Run out and get them and I'll say I've found the tin."

He crawled out and returned with the biscuits. "One must be prepared to suffer for doing good," he moaned.

Now that the *Idler* was firmly established, Jerome decided to start a twopenny weekly called *To-day*. My share of the work consisted in being a benevolent old bookseller who chatted to customers about the books they ought to buy. So full of wisdom was I that people wrote to ask my advice about their love affairs, and their husbands, and what they ought to do if a gentleman asked a girl out to tea without an introduction. To my credit, I always sternly insisted that an introduction was necessary. I enjoyed giving advice; it is so much easier than taking it. Barry Pain, too, enjoyed himself on the new paper. Whilst Jerome, with wonderful foresight, was telling the present ex-Kaiser what he really thought of him and predicting his ultimate destination, Barry Pain wrote a series of Cockney articles, with Cockney spelling, or what he imagined to be Cockney spelling, called "De Omnibus." I sat by an omnibus driver, almost the last of his race, one morning and asked him if he had seen these articles. He had.

"Well, what do you think of them?"

He gently drew his whip over the off horse's back. "The man as wrote those things, sir, knows a b——y lot about 'osses, but he can't spell!"

Barry Pain would come into the office with a cheery "Base and brutal G. B. B., lend me a pen and a pad," and,

whilst casually conversing, write his weekly article in an easy, effortless way which filled me with boundless admiration. One day he told me that he had at last realised the dream of his life.

I was glad to hear it.

"You know that beastly picture of 'The Christian Martyr,' the fat-faced woman with her hands bound, and supporting herself on a couple of lily-leaves in a pool of water, whilst the moonlight streams down on her, and her murderers steal away in the distance?"

"Of course."

"Well, I've written an article showing her up."

"Then you've no business to do it. That picture has afforded consolation to thousands of men when their rent's overdue and their wives have been nagging at them."

"She's worried me for years. Let's go down and show it to Jerome."

We showed it to Jerome, who smiled and said: "Very touching, but it can't go in."

"Can't go in! Why not?"

"It's been the shining light in millions of happy English homes, and you mustn't poke fun at it. Try something else."

"Oh—all right," and Barry Pain stuffed the article in his pocket. "As that *Idler* lift-boy says, 'you ain't got no sympathy.'"

"Get out."

We got out. The next week we went down again to Jerome's room. He looked up cheerfully. "Anything really good for me, Pain?"

"Oh yes," diffidently said Pain. "A nice little article about that Christian Martyr."

"Get out," again said Jerome.

This farce was repeated for several weeks. One afternoon Pain came into my room with a gladsome smile on his Herrick-like features. "That Christian Martyr's at the press. She'll be in the hands of the British public to-morrow."

"I congratulate you. What made Jerome give way?"

"He didn't give way. That's the beauty of it."

"Then how did you manage it?"

"He was suddenly called away for a couple of days and somehow it went down to the printers. There'll be a row next Monday."

But there was not. Jerome handed Pain a bundle of letters from thankful readers. One man said that Pain's article had saved him from treating his wife in the same way as the Christian Martyr, and that when he owned up to her, he and she made a bonfire of the picture after the servants had gone to bed.

Just before the war was over, I met Barry Pain outside the Leicester Square Tube. He carried a small but expensive-looking portfolio under his arm.

"What's that for?" I asked.

"I will not deceive you," he said cheerfully. "It contains my 'copy.' I am staying in the country and as stamps are so expensive I simply have to come up by train and take it to the office myself."

When Jerome was invited to go to America to lecture, Pett Ridge and W. W. Jacobs gave him a little farewell dinner at the Garrick. Barrie and Sir W. Robertson Nicoll were among the guests, and I also received an invitation. Things went on very swimmingly until Barrie was called upon to make a speech. He sat sucking at his pipe and

emphatically declined. At last he reluctantly said, "I'll not make a speech but I'll tell you a story."

I cannot give it in the vernacular, cannot reproduce his slow, serious voice. Sir W. Robertson Nicoll sat next to him, and, as Barrie went on, his face betokened that he was struggling with complex emotions.

"You know," said Barrie, taking his pipe out of his mouth, "Robertson Nicoll's habit of asking foolish, silly, irrelevant questions. We went to America together and visited the site of the battle of Bunker's Hill. The guide was a nice man, and, knowing Nicoll's habit of asking questions, I kept between them until, just as we were getting into the carriage, Nicoll slipped away under my arm, went up to our guide, and said : 'And who was Bunker ?' "

His victim afterwards assured me that there was not a word of truth in the whole story.

One afternoon, Jerome, always ready to champion the cause of the oppressed, sent up to my room to say that he was very busy. Two ladies had asked to see him. Would I see them for him and find out what they wanted ?

The two ladies, a mother and daughter, the latter a beautiful young girl, were shown in, and the mother, with many tears, told me her story.

It appeared that she had a comfortable income, but in an evil moment (she lived in the north of England) wanted a hundred pounds. Rather than let her friends know this, she applied to a local money-lender. She had paid off the full amount borrowed, together with exorbitant interest, but now the money-lender threatened to seize her grand piano and the rest of the furniture.

"But why did you come to Mr. Jerome about this ? You don't know him."

"No," said the innocent old lady, "we haven't that pleasure, but we read *To-day* and felt sure that he would help us if he could."

I went down and explained matters to Jerome. We found out the name of a solicitor in the place where the old lady lived and telegraphed to him to go ahead and threaten to prosecute the rascally money-lender. Her piano and furniture were saved, and the bloodsucker disgorged part of his ill-gotten gains.

CHAPTER XI

A NEW DEPARTURE

Though life seemed pretty full for me, something suddenly occurred to make it fuller. I was at the *Idler* office every day, nominally from ten to four, but, in reality, much longer, publishing three novels a year, writing journalistic articles and running two weekly columns. My bookseller article, occasional short stories, and secretarial duties at the New Vagabonds took up all my spare time. Work at the *Idler* had become almost mechanical, and I longed for a change of scene.

The change came. Sir Arthur Pearson (he was "C.A.P." then—to his friends) had built up an enormous business with *Pearson's Weekly* and a dozen other periodicals. Not content with this, he suddenly determined to start publishing books.

Now, when you start publishing, you must have an individual to select what you are going to publish. He is called a "reader," and I never yet heard, from George Meredith downwards, of a publisher's reader who has not rejected masterpieces. Of course, no publisher's reader can know that a masterpiece has been offered to him until it is published and the critic and the world tell him that it is a masterpiece. His manuscript-battered soul, after a long course of reading, becomes insusceptible to masterpieces, and so he makes mistakes. Generally, however, he averages things up by accepting a story which he did not know was a

masterpiece. The world says it is, and he congratulates himself on his own perspicacity. I copy from a well-known journal a list of some of the most notorious rejections of books which afterwards became famous.

Stanley Weyman: "The House of the Wolf."
Rudyard Kipling: "Plain Tales from the Hills."
Sir A. Conan Doyle: "Sherlock Holmes."
Anstey's "Vice Versa."
John Strange Winter: "Bootles' Baby."
Edna Lyall: "We Two."
Blackmore: "Lorna Doone."
Carlyle: "Sartor Resartus."
Mrs. Beecher Stowe: "Uncle Tom's Cabin."
Shorthouse: "John Inglesant."
Sir Henry Rider Haggard: "Dawn."
W. Clark Russell: "The Wreck of the Grosvenor."
Thackeray: "Vanity Fair."
Anthony Trollope, and many others.

Mr. Pearson's secretary, Ernest Kessell, called on me one day at the *Idler* office and asked me to go for a bicycle ride on the following Saturday. He was a neighbour of mine and I accepted the invitation. We talked "shop" most of the time and he returned to Mr. Pearson with what I am afraid was an unduly favourable estimate of my acquirements. Mr. Pearson wanted to see me and explained all his plans. Would I be his reader?

I said I would, and broke the news to Jerome, who also was very busy. He was unfeignedly sorry to lose me and expressed his regret to the business manager: "We shall never get another sub like him." "Thank God for that," said the manager. Although his remark savoured of unkindness, there may have been a certain amount of wisdom

in it, for when he blossomed out as an author he was very successful and made more money than I could ever hope to do. In writing a novel, I thought of the story only and not of the people who were to read it. If I had considered my readers more, perhaps the pecuniary results might have been greater.

At Pearson's I first met Peter Keary, his partner, the author of "Get On or Get Out." I appreciated the title of this work more fully when the time came for me to get out. Apart from one peculiarity, Peter Keary was very kind to me. Whenever I made a suggestion, he had dreamed it the night before and was waiting to put it into practice. As soon as I realised this peculiarity, I always prefaced my suggestions with "As you dreamed last night," and he smilingly agreed to them.

The busy hive called "Pearson's" was in Henrietta Street, Covent Garden. If I remember aright, it was just before Christmas when I went there. Peter Keary was making out his annual list of presents to the staff. "I think you ought to have something," he kindly suggested. "What would you like?"

I would really have liked a motor-car or some unobtrusive, inexpensive little thing like that, but did not care to say so, and vainly racked my brains to think of something. At last, in a fit of desperation, I blurted out that I wanted a new bath-sponge as my old one was coming to pieces. At the moment, it was the only thing of which I could think. Keary smilingly wrote down "bath sponge" opposite my name, and sent me an enormous sponge which I cut in two and made last for as many years.

The office was divided up into different departments and filled with multitudes of pretty girls who attended to the

competitions and ran the ladies' papers. Many of them were the daughters of professional men and as charming, good-natured, and unaffected as they were pretty. Lawson Wood was then engaged there doing "titles" for stories and any other odd job which happened along; J. B. Pinker had just left to become a literary agent; and several promising young men were being trained by Peter Keary on his "get on or get out" principle. There were huge competitions for Limericks and missing words, and so on. A regular army of broken-down clergymen and others of the world's unfortunates sorted out the competitions at so much a week.

In an evil moment, for me, I agreed to be the judge in a Limerick competition, and, as soon as the announcement of my accession to this high office was made, the letters I received from various competitors were unique. One well-known woman writer, without marking her letter private, suggested that I should tell her the winning lines so that her son, who wanted money to pay off his debts, might win the prize. An unsuccessful competitor, a Russian anarchist, favoured me with an epistle to the effect that he had left Russia to escape political tyranny but that I was a bigger tyrant than any he had ever met with in Russia. If he did not win a competition he would have my heart's blood. At the end of this genial letter he emphasised his remarks with a gory dagger dripping red ink. The most embarrassing of these communications was from a young lady whose spelling was not equal to her knowledge of the world. "Dear Sir," the letter ran, "Won't you come and have tea with me in my little flat in Kensington and tork over my chance of winnin a prize. I am very pretty and of an accomerdating disposition." The letter was consigned to the wastepaper basket as soon as I received it. As I went into the Stores

one day, a clerk who had received a prize bowed down before me. He was attending to a nice old lady, and said, "One moment, madame, if you please. My colleague will attend to you. Here is a gentleman of the utmost importance." In an awe-struck whisper he added: "He is judging *Pearson's* Limerick Competitions."

When I assumed my functions as reader, almost my first visitor was the late David Christie Murray, who agreed to write a novel and wanted the money for it in advance. Knowing that he was rather reckless about money matters, I drew up an agreement by which the payments were to be made every time I received a third of the MS. He was paid for two-thirds and did not finish the story. In the intervals, when he was not sending me telegrams stating why he ought to receive all the money at once, he would come in to see me. A man of great intellect, of consummate craftsmanship, and fine presence, he was always welcome when we had disposed of the money part of the interview. One day the conversation turned on autographs. "I'll forge you any you want," he said obligingly, and, taking two or three different kinds of nibs from his pocket, did so. I showed some of these forgeries to the people who were supposed to have signed them and they were amazed. It was a dangerous talent. A story is told of him that he once got tired of a novel he was writing and hurriedly wound it up by putting all the characters down a coal mine and flooding the mine. Whereupon, the indignant publisher made him let out the water from the mine, revive the characters, and finish the story properly.

Grant Allen frequently dropped in. He wanted to write a novel under a pseudonym, and, after some hesitation, I agreed to the experiment. It was called "The Typewriter Girl" and won instant success. His native town was Kingston,

Ontario, and I once met an old lady there who was quite indignant when I sang his praises. "Call him an author? He's not much of an author," she said fiercely. "Though he was born here, when he wrote an article about the place he said that there were twenty-six steps leading up to a certain house. I went there and counted them myself to make sure, and there were twenty-seven."

Grant Allen was very proud of a young nephew of his, one of W. T. Stead's secretaries. I had to interview "Julia's" friend one day and told Grant Allen's nephew about it. "When Stead's had enough of you," the youngster explained, "he'll stand on the hearthrug and press a bell with his foot. Then I shall come in and say some very important person wants to see him at once." The interview went capitally until Stead made for the hearthrug. "Please don't trouble to tread on the bell, Mr. Stead. I've enjoyed this chat so much. Good-morning." It is said of Stead that he once terminated an interview with the Czar instead of waiting for the Czar to do it.

After a time, everyone at *Pearson's* grew tired of publishing books, although they began again later on. I wrote conscientious reports on all the MSS. I read and they generally came back to me with "Will this pay?" scrawled in blue pencil. There was an old friend of Mr. Pearson's whom it was suggested should lighten my labours by reading MSS. He came regularly twice a week, and, after a chat, went away with a big bundle of MSS. under his arm. In the course of a few days the bundle was returned to me with the statement that its contents were no good, and that he would call for a fresh supply. Several times since then I have been fiercely reproached by authors who wanted to know why I had rejected MSS. I had never seen. The

climax came when a rival firm of publishers made a hit with one of these rejected MSS.

I was rather glad of the climax, because I was always pursued by the haunting fear that, as I continued to write novels myself, I might unconsciously, and in perfect good faith, make use of something I had read in MSS. submitted to me. At last, the fear became an obsession. My agreement terminated by "effluxion of time," and Mr. Pearson came up to my room to tell me that they did not propose to renew it. But I was so unconscious of his fell purpose that he could not do it, and sent Peter Keary instead. Peter, to use a Canadianism, "gave me the mitt" with the same promptitude with which he had given me the sponge.

On the whole, reading MSS. for a publisher is even more heart-breaking work than being a sub-editor. Think of the amount of care and toil which go to the making of the worst novel ever written, the hopes and fears it embodies, the need for its acceptance, the youthful Chatterton who, in the loneliness of his dismal garret, may blow out his brains, poor boy, because he has failed. A business man cannot afford to think of these things. Though I was not a business man, I could not afford to think of them either, yet they haunted me. I had eaten the bread of tears and drunk of the waters of affliction myself, and I did not relish causing others to starve on the same unpalatable fare.

Everyone was very sorry when I went away from *Pearson's*. Since then, poor Peter Keary has "Got Out" for another world and the late Sir Arthur Pearson, through his own blindness, helped thousands of fellow-sufferers to the light. For a man of his intense energy, blindness must have been a very dreadful thing, a soul-paralysing ordeal. But he survived the

ordeal and caused his own misfortune to minister to the happiness of all those who were similarly afflicted. If you wish fully to realise the truth of this, go to St. Dunstan's and see for yourself. Sad as the lesson is, it will teach you something you could never learn in any other way.

CHAPTER XII

THE NEW VAGABONDS

It had long occurred to me that a common meeting-ground for literary workers of all dimensions would be a very desirable thing. There were several exclusive clubs where the "big guns" met and fired at one another; but, on looking round, I could not discover one in which the big fry and the small fry commingled. Ever since the death of Philip Bourke Marston, the Old Vagabonds had lingered on, meeting occasionally until, their ranks depleted by death, about twenty remained. And we were getting a little out of date. Editors began to look askance on the frequenters of literary Bohemia. In an evil moment I had invited a rather prim editor to dine with me at a gathering of the Old Vagabonds. Two of its members who had looked upon the wine-cup not wisely but too well, suddenly came to blows, clinched, struggled through the door, rolled down the stairs locked in a fond embrace; tumbled through the bar of the "Mitre" in Chancery Lane, out through the door and on to the pavement, where a curious crowd speedily assembled. They sat up and looked at each other. One said: "Why are thesh foolsh staring at us? Lesh go home." So they staggered home, arm in arm, quite forgetting their feud. My editor also went home, his prim nose in the air.

On another occasion someone suggested that we should read original unpublished stories for the common delectation

and to prove how real genius was unappreciated—most of us had unpublished stories. The first attempt was unfortunate. The late Rudolf Blind, that silver-tongued orator, was very tired and sleepy, and the first story was interminable. There was something about a dog in it, and Coulson Kernahan, who was selected to read it, gradually became very nervous under the influence of Blind's questioning gaze. To his great relief, Blind went to sleep, and, with renewed confidence, my dear old friend proceeded with the dog's adventures. In a few minutes Blind woke up, caught the word "dog," and gazed severely at Kernahan. "I say, Kernahan, isn't that d—d dog dead yet?" "N-not quite dead yet," faltered Kernahan; "but I don't think he'll last longer than another quarter of an hour." "Kill him at once and put him out of his misery or I'll go to sleep again," retorted Blind. After that, there were no more readings of unpublished stories.

One day I met Douglas Sladen, whose boundless energy and good nature filled me with admiration. Sladen revived "Who's Who?" and added to it all the interesting features which made it so great a success. He sent round printed forms asking all about you, whether you were married or single, what you had written, and so on. The success of the book was assured when one distinguished woman writer returned her form with "not married at present."

I confided my project to Sladen, and he approved of it with his usual reckless promptitude. "I'll come in with you as joint secretary," he said, "and we'll make things hum. I know everybody and can get people to join us. We'll have women members as well. It's bound to be a success because it's never been done before. Why shouldn't women belong to a club of this sort? But we shall have to become respectable, give dinners, and wear evening dress. In a month

I can get you two or three hundred members. Then we'll have an interesting man or woman as the guest of the evening, and there you are. We shall go down to posterity as the pioneers of a new movement for bringing together all sorts and conditions of literary folk. The big ones must meet the little ones without wanting to eat them."

Knowing Sladen's enthusiasm when he once set about a thing, I believed him. I had witnessed the way he "made things hum" at his own delightful "Fridays," where he always had a real live lion or lioness, sometimes a cub or two. But he was a very busy man, and the story goes—a story for the truth of which I cannot vouch—that the Fridays came round so frequently that he sometimes booked two lions for the same night, quite forgetting the first one. There was a charming little Japanese room at the end of his suite in Addison Road. One night a bronzed and bearded solitary man, very much bored, sat there on a divan. To him entered another bronzed and bearded man. For a time they watched the crowd in silence through the Japanese curtains. "I say," at last hazarded one man, "I've just come from Africa and I don't know a soul here."

"Same with me," promptly answered the other, pulling a card out of his pocket. "I'm invited to meet a silly ass named—— "

The other man pulled a similar card out of his pocket. "That's my name," he grinned delightedly. "I'm invited to meet a silly ass named—— "

"I'm that silly ass. Come out with me and have some supper." And they went off arm in arm, whilst the third and latest lion blissfully purred to an admiring crowd.

On another of these memorable evenings, Frankfort Moore had expressed a wish to meet the newly-wedded wife

of a young author, and the ever-obliging Sladen joyously acquiesced in his wish. Moore was rather late in arriving at Addison Road, and the happy couple had already appeared. Directly they entered the room, Sladen, always intent on the well-being of his guests, paired off the wife with someone else, and, dragging the young author to the fire immediately opposite the door, fervently introduced him to a highly-painted woman with yellow hair and very few clothes. She was a "vaudeville" actress whose chief claim to distinction was that she possessed more pairs of open-work stockings than any other woman in the world. It would have taken at least half a dozen pairs of the stockings she wore on this occasion to make an ordinary pair. As she sat by the fire, the stockings, what there was of them, were very much in evidence. She was not in the first bloom of youth, and, at the time of Frankfort Moore's entrance into the room, was energetically explaining to the abashed newly-married young author that she did not approve of her latest husband and that "George Lewis, the solicitor, was going to make him sit up in the D. C."

Moore mistook her for the young author's wife and fled.

Mainly owing to the indefatigable Sladen, the New Vagabonds instantly succeeded. When we wanted an eminent guest, he would never take "no" for an answer. Of course, little unfortunate incidents occasionally happened. How could it be otherwise when so many people suddenly developed a deafness which could be cured only by sitting near the guest of the evening! Sir Henry Irving was coming to us one night and an old friend of mine wanted to sit next to him. I somewhat hastily replied that I was surprised he did not bring his baby to sit on Sir Henry's knee, and received a letter from my friend's baby, aged six months,

saying that she knew that knee and that nothing would ever induce her to sit on it. One lady asked me to provide her husband with a foot-warmer, "because he is so deaf."

Sladen's idea that we should have women members at the New Vagabonds worked very well, and delightful women most of them were. Some of the most prominent members were Mrs. Alec Tweedie, Mrs. Craigie ("John Oliver Hobbes"), Miss Beatrice Harraden, Mrs. Marie Connor Leighton, Mrs. Heron-Maxwell, Dr. Arabella Kenealy, Mrs. Belloc Lowndes, Mrs. Max Pemberton, Lady Semon, Miss Myra Swan, Mrs. C. N. Williamson, the beautiful but ill-starred Katherine Cecil Thurston, the author of "John Chileote, M. P.," Miss Helen Mathers, and Mrs. Burnett Smith ("Annie Swan").

One night Mrs. Thurston was to be the guest of the evening and confessed to me that she had never made a public speech in her life. What was she to do? I suggested that she should write out a nice little speech, learn it by heart, and go to my friend Alexander Watson, the well-known elocutionist and reciter. She learned the speech by heart, Alexander Watson taught her how to deliver it, and everyone was charmed. "It's so refreshing to hear these literary ladies speak," one guest observed. "It's evident that Mrs. Thurston's been accustomed to it for years and has no hesitation. She's beautifully fluent." Mrs. Thurston's husband, who was also to speak, did not take the trouble to go to Alexander Watson. Consequently, his speech was not a success. In listening to the radiant, beautiful woman who spoke to us that night, one little thought of how tragic her end would be. She died with appalling suddenness.

Mrs. Craigie ("John Oliver Hobbes") was naturally a very good speaker, and once told me that when she first began to write she called on a publisher who greeted her

with: "I am so glad to see you, Mrs. Joliver Hobbes." It made so good a portmanteau pseudonym that she was almost tempted to adopt it. She looked frightfully ill one night as I was taking her in to dinner. "Do ask them to let me off my speech," she implored. "My heart's queer, and I don't want to tumble down dead in the middle of it."

Mrs. Alec Tweedie has travelled all over the world and recounted her experiences in a most interesting series of travel books. She once went to Mexico and became a great friend of President Diaz. All the leading notabilities called on her, and she sent out cards for a reception, of course including their wives. The men (it seemed to be the Mexican custom) came without their wives, so she promptly declined to receive them. Then they went home to fetch their better halves, and those ladies were very grateful to Mrs. Alec Tweedie for bringing them out of their monotonous seclusion.

In her youthful days, Mrs. Belloc Lowndes distinguished herself as the first woman interviewer. A delightful personality so charmed her victims that she invariably obtained very successful interviews. Her "subjects" quite forgot that they were being interviewed, and, consequently, appeared to much greater advantage. Since then she has written numberless novels and serials, brought up a family of three, and retains her perennial cheerfulness.

Mrs. Marie Connor Leighton enjoys the distinction of being the best serial writer of weekly fiction in London. And her fertility is inexhaustible. Perhaps her most successful book is "Convict 99," which has recently had a great vogue on the films. She works best with the printer's devil on her doorstep. "Convict 99" was written in conjunction with her husband, Robert Leighton, who has stepped into Henty's

shoes as a writer of stories for boys. Their romantic marriage was brought about by his being her first editor and teaching her how to write.

The great Sarah Bernhardt once lunched with us. As usual, she was very late, but made up for it by reciting afterwards a poem of Alfred de Musset's; I think it was "La nuit d'Octobre." Her leading "young man" sat in a chair immediately in front of her. She leaned on the back of the chair and when she came to an unusually impassioned passage, tenderly laid her hand on his head and rumpled his curly black hair. At the Coliseum, where she was a great favourite, they still have a suite of rooms specially designed for the great tragedienne—drawing-room, dressing-room, and all complete. I went there one day to see her. The stage itself is divided up into sections. As the curtain drops on one scene, the next section comes along all ready and no time is wasted. When the Coliseum first started, there was a horse race on the revolving stage, but it had to be given up because one of the horses put its foot on the part which did not revolve and was suddenly precipitated into the orchestra.

Everyone knows William le Queux, another of our members, although it is not given to all to pronounce his name properly. The bookstalls are always crowded with his exciting and mysterious romances. Le Queux has been all over the world, and wherever he goes receives a decoration. He came to Vagabond dinners with neat little rows of miniature medals spread all over him. One night a girl asked me: "Who is that distinguished general with the wistful face, opposite me?" I was coming up to town one day, and a girl and her mother got into the train. The girl carried a book under her arm. When they were comfortably settled, the mother said: "Give me

that book of Le Qucks's, dear," and the daughter replied: "Excuse me, mother, but I think you mean Le Kooks." They appealed to me, and I said authoritatively that the proper pronunciation was "Le Kew"; another man in the corner broke in with "Le Kicks," and they were still kicking over it when I left the train.

With the exception of Mark Twain, the most original guest we ever had was the American humorist Bill Nye, who came over here with a great reputation and a head as bald as an egg. Englishmen in America who had received boundless hospitality from Bill Nye, were only too anxious to return it, with the result that the American humorist appeared at the dinner in a decidedly bibulous condition. He began his speech very slowly and solemnly and rang the changes on two words for the whole of it. Fortunately, it was before the days of women members:

"I thank you very much for the opportunity you have given me to-night, and very much for the obligation to-night to speak for the opportunity. I am very much obliged indeed, and thank you for the opportunity. I am one of those who answer to the obligation and one of those who offer to-night to answer to your obligation. I am very much obliged indeed for the very slight obligation which has been offered me to-night to give you an opportunity for an obligation offered me to-night by your opportunity; and I thank you very much indeed for that opportunity."

One night, at the New Vagabonds, destiny placed me between two well-known actresses. "I saw you," archly said an old lady afterwards, "sitting between the Scylla of Lady T—— and the Charybdis of Lady B——."

Once only have I seen Sladen unhappy—really unhappy. We were entertaining a bishop and his wife, and

Sladen was to have the honour of taking her in to dinner. Something had gone wrong—very wrong—with the bishop and his wife. To put it mildly, they were not in the best of tempers when they arrived. I endeavoured to reassure Sladen, thinking how noble it was of him not to endeavour to get out of it and make me take in the lady. He went gallantly forward to meet his doom, and met it. I crept behind a palm to see how he would acquit himself.

Sladen began the conversation in a light and airy manner by remarking that a great many years ago, when he was quite a young man and preparing for his "Little Go," he had read a book of hers which helped him tremendously in passing it. She snorted. It is not a nice thing to say of a bishop's wife, or of anyone else's wife, but there is no help for it. She snorted—snorted indignantly: "Really, Mr. Sladen, you must imagine me to be a very old woman," and stalked in to dinner in front of him. Whether she told the bishop of what had happened, I know not, but he also was in a caustic mood, and held forth at great length on the uselessness of newspapers in general. As there were two or three great newspaper proprietors present, I was rather apprehensive of what they might think about it. "Lastly," said the bishop, when he had finished damning all the other papers, "we come to the *Times*. What shall I say of the *Times*? I find the *Times* most useful, for its paper is of such good quality that I always use it to wrap up my shooting boots."

Sladen came to me one day with a very serious face. "Look here, G. B. B., we must have a *modus vivendi*."

"All right. What about?"

"You see, there are two of us, and when anyone kicks up a row about anything it's a bit awkward who's to take the blame."

" Oh, that's simple enough. If a man comes to me with a grievance about tickets or seats, or anything, I'll say I'm very sorry but it's that ass of a Sladen's fault. When he comes to you for the same reason, you tell him,' I'm very sorry, but what can you expect from an idiot like Burgin ? ' That will work admirably."

He joyously agreed. As far as the outer world was concerned, it did work admirably. Privately, however, I found that one or two bad-tempered notabilities had grudges against me for which, until I remembered our working agreement, I was unable to account.

Barry Pain was once asked to be the guest of the evening at a dinner. Here is his characteristic reply :

" Permit me to say that I shall have great pleasure in attending the dinner to Barry Pain. Indeed, I know of no author whose literary career I have followed with more real interest.

" To the best of my recollection, the guest of the Vagabonds is allowed to wear the same clothes as the waiters. If this is not so, kindly inform me lest I commit a ' fo par.' "

Sladen has dealt so exhaustively with the New Vagabonds in his " Twenty Years of my Life "—a most interesting book disfigured by villainous portraits of his friends—that it is superfluous for me to go into more details. The average attendance at a dinner varied from two hundred to four hundred members and guests, generally at the Hotel Cecil. The chairman proposed the health of the guest of the evening and the guest replied. After dinner there was half an hour's interval in which I hovered round and introduced people who were not happy to other people who wanted to be happy. Then there was a musical or dramatic entertainment.

One introduction was unfortunate. A man asked to be introduced to Anthony Hope, and I unsuspiciously took him up to Anthony Hope. "I'm so delighted to meet you," said the man. "I have had the pleasure of parodying you in *Punch*." The pleasure did not appear to be mutual.

At one time *Punch* decided to publish short stories, and, to my great delight, I was asked to contribute two. People did not take kindly to the innovation, and after my first story had appeared I vainly waited to see the other. A rumour went the rounds that *Punch* had decided not to publish any more stories. One day I was pressed by an editor for a short story in a hurry, and bethought me of my unpublished *Punch* tale. I wrote to Burnand (Burnand was an inveterate punster and is credited with having once said of himself, "A Bur'n and's worth two in the bush") asking, if he were not going to publish it, whether I might have the story back. With a very courteous letter, Burnand returned me the story, and I hied me to the editor who wanted one. "You can have this half-price," I said gaily. "'Tisn't often I can sell the same story twice over." The story appeared the next day, and the day after it came out, the sub-editor of *Punch* wrote to me: "Dear Mr. Burgin, When Mr. Burnand said you might have your story back, he did not know that it had been paid for. Will you kindly return either the story or the cheque?" I reluctantly returned the £25 paid by *Punch* for the story, and the paper which published it went bankrupt, so I ended by getting nothing for it. When I sought sympathy from Robert Barr, he said, "Serves you right. Never return a cheque when you have once laid hands on it." My only other appearance in *Punch* was when a gifted member of its staff parodied an article of mine about dancing which I had contributed to the *Evening Standard*.

THE LURE OF THE DANCE

(A little essayette in the topical manner (it is the day of the Pantomime Ball) of Mr. G. B. Burgin, author of . . . . etc., etc., etc.)

. . . There is no pleasure like dancing and none so generally neglected to-day. We should dance to our offices and dance back again. We should dance upstairs to bed and downstairs to breakfast. . . . The most famous dancing-set-to that I remember was at Nijni Novgorod, during the great fair. I was collecting local colour for a romance of Cossack life, and chanced one evening into the famous Samovar café, where whom should I see but the notorious General Morrisoff, the best dancer in the Russian Army. "Join me," he said, and in an instant we were in full swing round the room, to the intense delight of the weird cosmopolitan crowd. "*Voila!*" they cried, "the superb Englishman. *Tiens*, what steppes."

After the appearance of this parody, my prices went up at least five shillings a thousand words, for editors asked each other, "Who is this great authority on dancing that *Punch* thinks it worth while to parody?"

But to return to the New Vagabonds. On one occasion, when Lord Roberts was the guest, a certain young lady wanted to be introduced to him. I said that I would ask him (he was surrounded by a crowd of admirers) and did so. "May I have the pleasure of bringing her to you?" I inquired, not wishing to break up the crowd. "It will give me the greatest pleasure if you will *take* me to her," said Lord Roberts.

Those were very happy gatherings, and they ceased mainly because they required an enormous amount of time and work, and Sladen and I had to earn our daily bread. When Sladen was busy I did it all and could not keep it up. So we had a farewell dinner which the members gave to Sladen and myself, with Sir Arthur Conan Doyle in the chair. He said kind things about us, and most of the members drifted away to the "O. P. Club" and kindred bodies. Some day we hope to begin the Club all over again.

I have been secretary of several clubs since then, mostly unpaid, but I was more than repaid for my work in connection

with the New Vagabonds by the friendships I made, the "copy" I unconsciously secured, the opportunities afforded me for meeting all sorts and conditions of men and women, from bishops to artists' models. I have heard Lord Curzon described as a "little difficult." As far as I can remember, he was the only guest of the Club who, after the best dinner we ever gave (there were six hundred people present and he discoursed on Imperial Vagabondage) directly he got home sat down and wrote me a charming letter of thanks for the trouble I had taken to make the dinner a success :

"DEAR MR. BURGIN,

"Will you allow me to express to you my sincere and hearty thanks for the agreeable and most successful entertainment from which I have just returned. I never spent a pleasanter evening or received what I regard as a higher compliment.

"A dinner on so huge a scale could not be devised or carried out without entailing enormous labour on the executive, and I should like therefore, while my memory is still fresh, to send a line of special thanks to yourself.

"Yours very truly,

"CURZON."

I went to see Lord Curzon about this particular dinner, and in the hall were three chairs, each containing a hat, coat, and a pair of gloves of varying thicknesses, so that all the wearer had to do was to choose the appropriate one for the day's temperature. He is a wise man who is careful in little things in a climate such as ours.

In his old age—in reality, he is ever young—Sladen, in conjunction with Mrs. Baillie Reynolds and several other literary celebrities, has started an after-dinner club known as the "A.D.C." The idea is that literary people and others shall meet and talk without having to sit through a long dinner. All performances of any kind, whether musical or dramatic, are forbidden, and light refreshments

are served to the soothing strains of a string-band in the distance. Strange rumours have gone abroad about this latest offspring of Sladen's successful energy. "Wonderful man Sladen is," said a friend to me the other day. "I hear he's upset the Lyons' Corner House people by starting an A.B.C."

CHAPTER XIII

CRITICS AND CRITICISM

This is a dangerous topic; it is so fatally easy to say silly things about it; but it is part of the writing life and, therefore, presents a certain amount of interest, because criticism has a good deal of influence on young writers. One may sum it up briefly on the part of the author, young or old, that the artistic temperament claims praise, not necessarily from conceit, although that very often plays a prominent part in the desire for praise, but because, whether we deserve it or not, when a man writes an appreciative criticism of anything we have done it helps us to do better. Though the critic is very often speaking the truth when he says we have done bad work, from our point of view it makes us do worse. Candidly, we like buckets full of praise, and, when we get them, say to ourselves, "Wonderful discrimination this critic has. He recognises real genius when he sees it." If, on the other hand, the critic has not recognised the greatness of our work, its wondrous versatility and originality, we feel sorry for him—very sorry—and tell our grieving relations (curiously enough one's relations always see the bad notices of a book and never the good ones) that the man who wrote the criticism in question is what Kipling calls a "failed B.A.," *i.e.*, he has tried to write books himself and made a mess of it. Hence, his envious criticism of men who really can write books.

"Tell it not in Gath, publish it not in the streets of Askalon," but I have been, and, in a minor degree, still am a critic myself. Criticism, however, is a thorny path, and I am inclined to think that you cannot run with the hare and the hounds. If you are a novelist, let criticism alone; if you are a critic, give every novelist a wide berth. The supreme duty of the critic is to tell the truth. He owes it to his employer, to himself, to the subject of his criticism. He must be impartial and he can only be impartial when he is not brought into familiar contact with the object of his criticisms. If a man is your friend, it is not in human nature to tell the public in all the cold-blooded atrocity of print the truth about him, although the truth must be told. If you soften down the truth, you are dishonest. When you know that you may meet the subject of your criticism at lunch the day after you have told the truth about him, and that the friendship of years may receive a severe blow because he knows that you have written the criticism of his book and hurt him, how can you possibly do this? If you are courageous and honest and try to do it, you will soon find yourself alone in the world.

Until I learned a little sense, I had several encounters with the critics. A man once wrote a criticism of a novel of mine in which he made a gross mis-statement of fact, so I imprudently wrote a postcard to the writer of the review, to the care of the editor of his paper, because I did not know his name. I said, "If you will turn to page so and so, you will see that what you have said is untrue. Kindly correct the mistake in your next issue." To my surprise, I received a letter from the editor of the paper saying that he had read my postcard, which of course he ought not to have done, and that a correction would appear in the next issue. Not

only did the correction not appear but my next book was savagely "slated." Of course, his carelessness had got the reviewer into trouble, and, presumably, he "took it out of me" in his review of the next book. Still, this may have been pure conjecture on my part.

Such an experience ought to have cured me of writing to papers about my Press criticisms, but it did not. I was perturbed about the absence of criticism of my books on the part of a certain paper and wrote to the editor saying that of course I was not asking for a favourable notice but only for some notice, as even "slating" was better than no notice at all. I got it—in the neck! But then it was my own fault; I had brought it on myself. What really irritated me was when I wrote a serious novel a kindly reviewer declared that it was written in my "customary light and sportive vein." But then, as one negro gentleman said to another negro gentleman, "Ye can't be 'spected to colluscitate all the grand principles of" —criticism. Only yesterday I was riding on the top of a tram and fell to talking with a delightful sailor-man about negroes. "'Orrible fellers is niggers, sir," he said, borrowing a match. "'Orrible fellers. They never really loves you till you knocks 'em down."

A candid friend told me that I was "writing myself out," and advised me to take a pseudonym. I signed a short story (it appeared in the *Pall Mall Magazine*) under a girl's name and flattered myself that I had effectually disguised my identity, only to be told a few evenings after the story appeared, by a girl I was taking in to dinner: "Have you seen that story in the *Pall Mall?* Some woman has been imitating you to the life."

Shortly after this happened, I lunched with the "reader" for a great publishing house, and he incautiously said that

he prided himself on recognising talent, even though it were unknown, so I played a "low-down" trick on him by sending him a novel signed by a girl's name.

It came back to me a month afterwards (by this time I had written some forty novels) accompanied by a letter in my critical friend's well-known writing, saying that he had read the story with much interest and that, for a beginner, it showed signs of promise, though there was a fatal lack of experience in the handling of the plot, and the characterisation was not all that it ought to be. Still, if I persevered, in the fulness of time I might do something really worth reading. My style, however, required the most careful attention.

I knocked out the pseudonym and handed the book to my publisher in the ordinary course, and, soon after it appeared, again lunched with my friend the critical reader. "I can't make out about that last book of yours," he said in a puzzled kind of way. "I seem vaguely to have seen it before."

"You have. I sent it to you under a girl's name and you wrote back that for a beginner it showed signs of promise, etcetera, etcetera."

"Great Scott! Did I really do that?"

"You did."

"Then, for God's sake, don't tell anybody I did it."

And I have not.

Matthew Arnold once wrote very sensibly on criticism: "It is of the last importance that English criticism should clearly discern what rule for its course, in order to avail itself of the field now opening to it, and to produce fruit for the future, it ought to take. . . . Its business is simply to know the best that is known, and thought in the world, and by in its turn making this known to create a current of true and fresh ideas."

I once had a chat with Theodore Watts-Dunton about criticism and he told me: "I will never take a book for review unless I can say something in its favour, and a good deal in its favour. It would afford me no pleasure to give pain to a young writer. This smart 'slating' is the easiest achievement in the world. Give me the aid of a good amanuensis, and I will engage to dictate as many miles of smart 'slating' as could be achieved by any six of the smart 'slaters.' But I leave such work to them, as do all the really true critics—men to whom the insolence which the smart 'slaters' seem to mistake for wit would be as easy as to me, only that, like me, they hold such work in contempt. Why, if I did not, I should not give attention to literature at all. In a true and deep sense, all pure literature is fiction. The greatest of all writers of the novelette is neither Sir Conan Doyle, Mr. Bret Harte, Miss Wilkins, Mr. Cable, nor even Mr. Kipling, nor Mr. Stockton (great as these are in this line), but the old Burmese parable-writer who gave us the story of the girl-mother and the mustard-seed."

I did not know the story of the girl-mother and the mustard seed, but I was reminded by Theodore Watts-Dunton's mention of Rudyard Kipling of a delightful afternoon I once spent with him in his rooms overlooking the river. A dagger tumbled down from the wall, and, when I went to pick it up, Kipling explained that it had a history. When he got this dagger, it had been taken from between the shoulders of a dead woman and was destined to slay two more victims. I suggested that we should take the deadly weapon down to the river and throw it in. He agreed, then paused. "Better not. Someone might see us throw it in, fish it out again, and send it on its mission." So we put it back on the wall.

This marvellous master of detail once wrote a story called

" The Ship that Found Herself." It described a ship on her first voyage across the Atlantic and abounded in technicalities of the most abstruse description. Half a dozen Glasgow shipbuilders wrote to me to say that they had held solemn conclave together and were able to find two mistakes in the story, and on one of those they were not agreed. This was rather different from an old Scotchman who, when Kipling's " McAndrew's Hymn " appeared, wrote to tell me that he did not approve of the author's Scotch and had " re-written the poem properly."

I was correcting a proof of Kipling's story " My Sunday at Home," and in that proof, when the navvy hauls the squire out of his brougham, the navvy said : " Come out, you——." It was just the word a navvy would have used but it looked so awful in the cold nakedness of print that I was thunderstruck. Barr and myself took sweet counsel together. We dared not alter the offending word lest Kipling should withdraw the story, one of the finest he ever wrote. At last, we decided to send him the proof as it was. It came back with the offending word altered to " beggar," and we breathed again.

I ran against the great author (no one can possibly deny greatness to the writer of "Kim" and " My Lord the Elephant ") in a November fog, and he casually suggested what an easy thing it would be for a man who had an enemy to meet that enemy in a fog, take his arm, hold him in friendly converse and then hurl him into the river from Waterloo Bridge. I said good-bye in a hurry to the man who has written the best short story in the world—" Without Benefit of Clergy."

Some time later, when I wanted him to tell me what his amusements were, he wrote " Allow me, ' in the most delicate manner in the world,' as Chucks said, to ask what is the good

of an amusement if you let the public (who have their own amusements) into it ? "

When I get from the Press Cutting Agency those *beastly* little green paper packets containing unfavourable notices, I say to myself: " Well, you *will* write books, and if you cannot cure yourself of that regrettable habit you must take the just and natural consequences of this mental aberration on your part. The critics are trying to ' create a current of true and fresh ideas ' in you. Start a fresh story to-morrow."

CHAPTER XIV

LEARNING TO LECTURE

THERE comes a time in the position of every author when it occurs to him that he can make a very desirable addition to his income by lecturing. In the enthusiasm evoked by this prospect, he quite forgets all the attendant disadvantages. He may never have addressed an audience before ; he may be an extremely shy man ; and he may also have some impediment in his speech which, though not very marked in ordinary conversation, would form a fatal objection to success as a lecturer. But he quite overlooks these disadvantages when thinking of the vast multitudes whom he will move to tears or laughter (the latter may sometimes be quite unconscious, on his part) and who will crowd to take the horses out of his carriage and draw him in triumph to his hotel. I once heard an author, who was afflicted with a stutter, leave off in the middle of a lecture to fight it out with the recalcitrant word. When he finally succeeded, he was cheered to the echo.

There is the man who makes his name in some other walk of life and starts lecturing because people want to see him and to hear what he has to say on some special subject. Sir Arthur Conan Doyle on *Spiritualism* is a case in point. And there is the man who happens to be a remarkably good speaker, has something to say, and makes his way solely as a lecturer.

A great deal depends upon the right platform manner.

When a man creeps timidly on to the platform and buries his nose in his notes, he fails to magnetise his audience and they very soon tire of him. But if he strolls out with his hands in his pockets and looks at the audience as if they were his dearest friends and he has come to have a chat with them, the ice is broken at once. And he must never dispense with the green baize table with a jug of water on it. The mere act of sipping at a tumbler of water induces the audience to believe that he is working hard to interest them, and they appreciate it.

The way a lecture agent generally arranges is to wait until he gets a sufficient number of enquiries from different parts of the country about some well-known man. What he likes to do is to arrange dates for a lecturing tour of about two months. He then approaches the man he wants to get to lecture and lays flattering proposals before him. "But," says the victim, "I have never lectured in my life. I really don't know how to set about it." "The best way," insidiously suggests the agent, "will be to go to some actor and take lessons in elocution." Unfortunately, the lecturer sometimes relies on his own individuality and considers training unnecessary. This, of course, is a great mistake. The first essential is to make one's self heard plainly. A man must have a clear and distinct delivery. This does not mean speaking loudly. I know one man who shouts so much that he nearly takes the roof off the house, but that does not prevent his being very indistinct. Zangwill, for instance, although he has not a very strong voice, is remarkably clear and distinct. He speaks with great rapidity, but at the same time is heard with ease in the largest hall on account of his absolutely distinct delivery. I had to speak once in a big hall at the Hotel Cecil, so, to make sure that my voice carried, posted a

waiter at the opposite end of the room. "Do you hear me asking you, waiter, if you would like to have eighteenpence?" The answer came back, "I could hear you better sir, if you made it half a crown."

As far as subject is concerned, it is quite impossible to predict what will interest the public. The successful lecturer is the specialist—the man who knows something which others do not, something about which they are anxious to hear.

A light and entertaining lecture may last for an hour and a half, but the average time for more solid ones should be an hour and a quarter. However good a man may be, if he lectures for two hours people become tired and bored; and once the impression gets abroad that a lecturer is a bore, it is fatal to his chances of success.

The only man who can go on lecturing until the Day of Judgment without tiring his audience, is my friend Arthur Diósy. He once came to Highgate to lecture. When the curtains were drawn apart he was "discovered" standing behind a table with a green cloth reaching to the ground. "Ladies and gentlemen," he explained, "I cannot come out from behind this table until I have your permission. The fact is, I have never been here before. It is a dark winter's night, and there was no cab at the station. Consequently I had to walk through the mud and my trousers are bespattered with the alluvial deposits of your charming village. Now, if I have your permission, I will come out." As soon as the permission had been uproariously granted, he came out from behind the table and lectured for an hour and a half. At the end of the lecture, the audience declined to move. "Very well," said he, pulling out his watch. "'The little more and how much it is.' How much is it to be in this case?" The audience suggested half an hour, and, with

the most consummate ease, Diósy continued for another half-hour. "Such a nice, obliging gentleman," said one old lady as he went away. "I wonder whether he'd come and have a quiet cup of tea and a toasted muffin with me."

With regard to the manner of delivery and preparation, a man is born with his own manner and cannot get rid of it. I once knew a lecturer who spoke so naturally that he quite offended an old lady in the audience, because, as she indignantly remarked, "He isn't lecturing, but just talking." If possible, a lecturer should always speak without manuscript; at the same time, he should not lecture without having prepared anything. He should have his lecture typed out and carefully commit it to memory; otherwise, if unaccustomed to public speaking, he begins to wander and his audience wanders out.

If the lecturer is manifestly nervous, his hearers become nervous and fidgety too. A natural, easy, unaffected manner is the best. A certain Member of Parliament once sought the advice of a friend how to prepare himself for his first speech to his constituents. "Oh, nervousness is all nonsense," said the friend. "I don't see why you should be more afraid of a collection of idiots when speaking to them than if you were addressing only one idiot. The best thing for you to do is to go into the kitchen garden every morning, and practise your speech on a bed of cabbages." That would-be speaker did so; but when he got on his feet to address his constituents, he had a very bad attack of stage fright and the only words he could utter were, "I've nothing to say except I'm very glad you're not all cabbages." By the time they had done laughing, he recovered his self-possession and made a remarkably witty and brilliant speech.

The golden rule for a lecturer to observe is always to keep

his temper even though his lecture is doing badly. When anything goes wrong, he should try to make capital out of it. Once, when a lecturer's lantern went out, he filled up the quarter of an hour before it could be set going again by telling the audience miscellaneous anecdotes. The result was that the audience sympathised with him and gave him three hearty cheers. Fred. Villiers, the well-known war correspondent, was once giving a lecture on the Bombardment of Alexandria. The slide on the screen represented the bombarding vessels coming into the harbour and gradually getting ready to begin. Before they began, however, the lantern operator accidentally let fall one of the heavy gas cylinders, making a noise which was a very good imitation of a bombardment. Instead of being disconcerted, Villiers turned to the audience and said, "I'm afraid they're beginning the bombardment a little too previously. It will be more appropriate if we wait until the next slide is on the screen."

Forty or fifty years ago, lecturing was not a profession, except with a few persons. Eminent men occasionally gave gratuitous lectures on very special subjects. Nowadays, there is not a fortune in lecturing; the men who have made large sums at it can readily be counted on one hand. Some men lecture as an amusement, others to make a welcome addition to their incomes; but the man who is absolutely dependent on lecturing practically does not exist. The field is so crowded by amateurs that they spoil the market.

For anyone who is ambitious of attaining a good prose style, the fatal facility (rather than felicity) of expression obtained by frequent lecturing is most pernicious. A written lecture, like a written sermon, is a cross between that most delightful of prose forms, an essay, and an oration, which is not a literary form at all. The lecturer is tempted to be

eloquent, brilliant, antithetic, to indulge in *ad captandum* rhetoric, and overstep the modesty of literature in every way. Let him print his successful lecture as he delivered it and see how it comes out as a piece of literary work.

It is true that Milton and Ruskin have succeeded in being eloquent and oratorical in prose which still has its literary value, but they are perilous models for imitation. It is true also that Jeremy Taylor's sermons contain passages which have all the imaginative charm of essays ; but whether they were as effective in the pulpit as they are when we read them at leisure, may be questioned.

The delivery is half the battle. Few people can read decently, especially their own compositions. A lecturer should know his text sufficiently well to address his audience directly, sending his words straight at them. A glance at each sentence should be enough. The art of reading consists in knowing the exact meaning and relative importance of each clause, phrase, and word, and conveying this to the audience by distinct utterance and right intonation. Many people slur their consonants and fling about vague vowels in a monotonous sing-song, the property of which is to make people drowsy.

To turn to the lighter side of lecturing. A friend told me of an experience which befell him in Scotland. It was a very hot afternoon and he sorrowfully observed his audience fall asleep till all were snoring except one fellow in the gallery, who was known to be the natural, or fool, of the place. The only man in the room who had shown decent civility and allegiance by remaining awake, he informed his somnolent audience, was poor Jamie Macalister, the fool. "Oo, ay," said Jamie from the gallery ; "an' if a hadna been a fool, a'd have been asleep too."

What the lecture hall patrons really want is gossip. Tell them what Dickens said to you at Gad's Hill; imitate Tennyson's reading of 'The May Queen'; give a diverting anecdote confided to you by Milton; reveal to them a rumour that Shakespeare once said of Anne Hathaway, "Anne hath a way with her"; and the audience will stay to the end and cheer you as though you were a Derby winner.

The supreme virtue of a lecturer is brightness. Make your audience laugh early and make them laugh often. Then the lecture agent will flutter cheques at your feet like snowflakes, freshen you genially with a golden rain, and thus enable you still to enjoy the improvident hobby of writing books.

S. R. Crockett once confided to me that the only story of his lecturing which he could remember was a sad one. It was after one of the few public lectures he ever delivered. A heavy, solemn-faced Scot came round after the tragedy and shook him by the hand in a melancholy manner.

"I hae read a' your buiks," he said; and, after a pause, "up to this."

Crockett expressed his thanks. The man was silent, awhile, and tried again.

"You dinna do this for a livelihood?" he asked, referring to the recent lecture.

"No," meekly replied Crockett.

"I was thinking that," said Crockett's critic, with still deeper solemnity.

Moncure D. Conway once told me that in his young days lecturing had become an important peripatetic vocation in America for able and scholarly thinkers who had espoused new views in religion or political or social philosophy. Their heresies had deprived them of welcome in churches or in legislatures; but their ideas were heard of in all parts of the

country with increasing curiosity; and the "Lyceum Lecture," as it was called, developed itself as a universal pulpit for those who had outgrown other pulpits. The founder of the old lecture system in America, Ralph Waldo Emerson, was eagerly listened to in all the great American cities, and afterwards gave several series of lectures in England. The lecturers in those days had "burning questions" to deal with—Slavery, Transcendentalism, Position of Woman, Fourierism—and they could not help being inspired into eloquence. But the abolition of slavery, and the passing away of militant methods of reform—revolutionary fire making way for evolutionary lucidity—and other causes, have turned the American lecture-hall into a place of amusement; and the Emerson, Agassiz, Holmes, Beecher, Phillips of old times are replaced by the reciter, or possibly by "Brudder Bones." Some of the lecturers used to be highly paid; Agassiz or Beecher would get fifty pounds for one lecture, which they might repeat in many places.

Sir Anthony Hope had never lectured nor tried to lecture. I once saw some charades in which he unconsciously figured. The charades were based on the names of popular novelists, and there was one which nobody guessed. A pretty nurse bent anxiously over a dying man in hospital, and the name proved to be "Ain't any hope." Sir Anthony has no idea of these things, and has never been to a lecture since he was compelled to do so in his Oxford days. He will not boast of his virtue but says that he may live to lecture or even lecture to live. As a matter of fact, he hazards the wild conjecture that most men begin to lecture by trying it on their wives.

The lecture season starts early in October and ends in March. That is the time when people want to be amused during their evenings; in summer you cannot get an audience.

When an audience is bored by a lecturer, any accident to his apparatus comes as a great relief. A lecturer with magic-lantern views on the subject of the Holy Land had a Sunday School audience badly in need of Sunday-schooling. They had been doubtful during the view of the Mount of Olives, obstreperous at the sight of the Dead Sea (with mechanical effects), and during the exhibition of the Pool of Bethesda they went so far as to give way to low, practical jokes. "This picture," said the lecturer, "is——"

Here he paused, the bright disc vanished, and the sheet suddenly became dark.

"This picture is——" he tapped emphatically with his foot, and no picture appeared.

"It's 'ell," suggested a small voice from the front bench.

"No," said the lecturer sadly, "it's not, *but it will be for the boy at the back if he doesn't get off that gas-bag.*"

CHAPTER XV

ON GETTING ONE'S CHARACTERS

People often ask me how does an author get his characters for a novel. The question is much easier to ask than to answer, for no one really knows. Different authors originate their characters in different ways; it is all a question of temperament and individuality. One writer sees a man in the street, is struck by some peculiarity in his appearance, goes home and constructs a character round that peculiarity; another talks to a man in the train and remembers something he says; a third goes to a dance and meets a beautiful woman with a very sad expression. Though she has everything to make her happy, she is sad. Why is she sad? He invents a reason for her sadness and puts it somewhere in the back of his head for future reference.

The most trying part of a novelist's life is that his work is never done, for these brain phantoms have a knack of recalling themselves to his recollection at a very inopportune moment. He may be sitting at dinner talking to a most delightful hostess and the girl heroine of the novel he is writing suddenly obtrudes herself on his attention. She wants to do something that he has not intended her to do, and it is useless to argue with her. His brilliant anecdotes miss fire, and his hostess afterwards informs her husband that Mr. Smith the novelist gives himself airs and pretends to be absent-minded.

When that obstinate girl heroine comes between the unfortunate author and his hostess, he knows at once that if he does not go home and attend to her wishes she will become sulky and refuse to take her proper part in the story. Should he remain obdurate, regardless of the conventionalities she will call on him during the night and "nag" at him. A well-known poet once aroused his wife at three in the morning. "I've just thought of a lovely new word," said he. "I've just thought of an ugly old one," she retorted, and went to sleep again.

The only way in which to pacify your obstreperous heroine is to get up, put on your dressing-gown, go into your study with its cosy anthracite stove, and "whack off" her unreasonable demands. Then perhaps, until something else upsets her, she will let you alone.

Most persons seem to think that because an author uses a typewriter his fiction is apt to become mechanical and machine-made, although the reverse is actually the case. It is easy enough to learn to use a typewriter, the only difficulty being that the letters of the keyboard are not arranged alphabetically. Once that difficulty is overcome, there is no more trouble, for tapping the keys is as mechanical an act as dipping the pen in an inkpot. Children, when they learn to write, look up and remember that they have to dip their pens into inkpots. So with the typewriter. If I may be pardoned for obtruding my own methods of work, I may mention that when I get an idea for a chapter, I knock it off "red hot" on the typewriter, correct it, and my secretary makes a fair copy. I revise that, and she makes another copy. That copy is touched up and the final copy is then made. Every book I have ever written has been done in this way, three or four times over. One has to be careful about

repetitions of phrases and little things like that. Henry James and his secretary once spent a whole morning in deciding the proper position of a comma, and even then they could not agree. But when one is carried away by the rush of a fresh idea, one does not consciously look for each key on the typewriter. The keys act of themselves as naturally as the pen goes to the inkpot. Eden Phillpotts once confessed to me that he could never use a typewriter because the ringing of the little bell at the end of each line irresistibly reminded him of a railway station and took him off his work.

But to return to our characters and how they are created. As a rule, we begin with the heroine ; and, in spite of her many virtues, or because of them, she ought to be the most prominent person in the book. She knows from the start that in all probability she will have to put up with a good deal, and must be caught in an amiable mood at her first introduction to the reader, or she will not impress him ; and most heroines like to make a favourable impression on the reader. If they could speak they would tell him that they know far more about themselves than any purblind author does.

Beauty is only skin deep (some profane scoffer has said, "sin deep"), but, as one so seldom gets beneath the surface of anything, this is one of the countless advantages of being beautiful. In fiction we sympathise with the plain heroine who is badly treated by the wickedly beautiful adventuress, and marries the hero when the adventuress has mauled him so badly that he is not worth having. The punishment fits the crime. In real life, however, most of us shun the plain heroine. "Put upon my tombstone," once said a dying girl whose morals were more impeccable than her French—"put upon my tombstone I was not beautiful but I was *rekerkey*. Then posterity will be sorry for me." But

posterity will not have time to look at the tombstones of plain people. In real life it is the initial iniquity of a beautiful girl always being supposed to be good that depresses us. We start with the conviction that she is a saint simply because she is beautiful, and pass by with a casual glance the shivering, shabby, ugly bundle of feminine nerves in the corner, whose little finger is sometimes worth more than the whole of the beautiful girl's beautiful body.

"You see that girl over there?" asks Jones. "The one with the lovely profile and snowy dress. Somehow, she diffuses an atmosphere of purity and goodness about her. I'm not a preachy-preachy kind of fellow, doncherknow, but to win the love of a woman like that would——"

"Land you in the Divorce Court in three months," Cynicus rejoins. "That's Mrs. Pendleton, who ran away with young Morrison because her elderly husband would insist on eating peas with his knife."

"Ah!" says Jones enthusiastically, "just what I thought. How you misjudge her! It takes a morally and physically beautiful nature to make so strong a protest against vulgarity. A plain girl would have affected not to see that her elderly husband ate peas with a knife."

There is no denying that beautiful heroines score heavily over plain ones. From their cradles to their graves, they are petted and spoiled until at last they begin to believe that they have really done something supremely clever in being beautiful. Their physical charm, however, is so often achieved at the expense of their moral qualities. They use their beauty to obtain the good things of the world; and they are the potent force which delays the arrival of the Millennium. In theory we recognise this and say how wrong it is. In real life we go out to dinner and swear inwardly if plain Miss Smith

is allotted to us, whilst beautiful Miss Robinson sits in statuesque grace with that puppy Brown. Then the ugly Miss Smith begins to talk to us—if we are worthy of being talked to by her. She talks of things which were once our ideals; tells us beautiful fancies; fills us with soaring thoughts; seeks to surround us with her own exquisite atmosphere; but all the time we mentally beat our breasts and say, "Poor little woman! What a pity her voice is so shrill, her teeth are so atrocious, her mouth is so like that of a young sparrow's. Where are her gracious womanhood, the potentialities of beauty, the charm of her sex?"

It is nonsense also to talk about the laws of compensation; that a beautiful woman must be a fool and a plain one a genius. Very often the injustice of real life comes in when the beautiful girl is not a fool and the plain one is; one has everything, the other has nothing. Beauty is the one potent power in the world, more especially in the world of fiction, which conquers everything. Your beautiful woman sins—and is forgiven; your ugly one falls—and is driven on to the streets. I dare not, however, even in fiction, recommend the way out of the difficulty followed by a Mormon Elder I once met. "'Tain't possible," he said, "to find one woman everything she orter be. Just sample my bunch of wives" (he admitted, in confidence, that he had a "bunch") "and you'll find among the five I've got all I want. When I'm tired of the goldarn foolishness of beauty, I go in for a little of the hoss sense of ugliness; and so on. It's expensive, needs a good many dollars to run my large fam'ly of little ones, but, take it by and large, it's a good all-round plan; and if there's a fun'ral in the fam'ly, why, I guess it don't leave so much of a blank behind."

The stock character in fiction is the much-abused

mother-in-law, although in real life she is often more charming than her daughter. Most novelists abuse her because their predecessors have generally done so.

We pride ourselves on our civilisation; we pity the heathen; we scorn their cannibalistic propensities; and yet we take inoffensive English ladies who have passed a certain age—ladies whose declining years we ought to comfort with delicate observances—and caricature them. Why?

If we look up the modern authorities as to the falsity of the fictional prejudice against mothers-in-law, I may quote the custom of suttee in India, which, apparently, was ordained solely that the mother-in-law might enjoy her deceased son-in-law's property without any interference from his widow. The American leading case on the subject of mothers-in-law (Max Adeler *v.* the Ladies of Chicago) will not bear examination; remorse has since led the plaintiff into becoming a deacon of his church, so that he may whitewash the mothers-in-law whom he had previously blackened in print.

Of course, there are bad mothers-in-law, but very few. I know of one case where a young man's career was temporarily ruined because he did not sufficiently appreciate his mother-in-law. When he heard that she was weak in the legs, he chose him a house upon a lofty hill-top, and chuckled greatly at her discomfiture. But he had no sooner signed a twenty-one years' lease of this house than a tramway company built a line to the top of the hill, and his mother-in-law achieved his tardy salvation by coming to visit him every day. The man who would lay his hand on his mother-in-law, either in fiction or in real life, "save in the way of kindness," is a wretch whom it were base flattery to call an English gentleman.

The clergyman is another stock character of the novelist, Anthony Trollope being the least offender against the cloth.

His Rev. Thomas Hardy in "The Warden" will live for all time. Of course, in the old dramatists, you get the time-serving sycophantic clergyman who sits below the salt and who is the go-between in intrigues. Thackeray has the Rev. Dr. Tusher, who is rewarded for his complaisance by marrying the lady's maid. Goldsmith gives us the Rev. Dr. Primrose, who was by nature an admirer of happy human faces. "When," says that lovable divine, "any one of our relations was found to be a person of very bad character, a troublesome guest, or one we desired to get rid of, upon his leaving my house I ever took care to lend him a riding-coat or a pair of boots, or sometimes a horse of small value, and I always had the satisfaction of finding he never came back to return them."

Very different from Goldsmith's amiable cleric was a certain modern divine who received a "call" to a richer living. When a visitor wanted to know whether the vicar had resolved to accept the "call," the vicar's small son informed him, "Pa's in his study praying for guidance; Ma's upstairs packing." The most shocking story I ever heard of a bad clergyman in real life happened some fifty years ago; but no novelist would dare to depict him in a modern novel. He had been promised the reversion of a fat living, the occupant of which was a dying old man. Meantime, he received the offer of a living superior to the one he then occupied but not so good as the one held by the old man. The parson seeking preferment did not want to miss the inferior living in case the old man should recover. The last day allowed for his decision had come, and he was in an agony of doubt. Just as he was about to write to his bishop accepting the inferior living, in came a message to say that the old clergyman was dead. "Father, I thank Thee," said

the self-seeking cleric, and immediately accepted the better living.

To come down to modern instances in fiction, Mr. H. G. Wells's clerics in the "Wonderful Visit" are very finely drawn. The lovable vicar, with his passion for collecting, and the darkly suspicious curate, are equally true to life. Take, for instance, the scene between the vicar and the angel:

"What is this?" said the Angel abruptly.
"That's a stuffed kingfisher. I killed it."
"Killed it!"
"Shot it," said the vicar. "With a gun."
"Shot! As you did me?"
"I didn't kill you, you see. Fortunately."
"Is killing like that?"
"In a way."
"Dear me. And you wanted to make me like that—wanted to put glass eyes in me and string me up in a glass case of ugly green and brown stuff?"
"You see," said the vicar, "I take an interest in birds, and I (ahem!) collect them. I wanted a specimen——"
The Angel thought for a minute. "Do you often kill?" he asked the vicar.

But in many modern novels "the fool curate" is a stock character, and is easily caricatured. On the whole, for every well-drawn, true-to-life clergyman in fiction, you get about a dozen caricatures.

An obliging critic friend—some authors have friends even among the critics—once explained to me that a good heroine is uninteresting because one always knows what she will do, and that a wicked heroine is far more interesting because very often she herself does not know what she is going to do, and, therefore, has all the charm of the unexpected. There is always a charm about the unexpected. The mere fact of not knowing how a story is going to end is sufficient to fill the ordinary human being with a wild and consuming desire

to find out, although the circumstances may be such that it is utterly impossible for him to do so. One day I got into a train at Liverpool Street and fell into conversation with a good-looking young sailor who began to yarn to me. Amid the pleasurable excitement of listening to his stories, I forgot to ask him where he was going to alight. Something cropped up about New South Wales. "I'd like to go there," I said. "Were you ever there?"

"I was and I wasn't."

"That's a pity. I should like to see Sydney. How was it you didn't see it?"

"Well, in this way. When we got into Sydney Harbour I'd a row with the first mate, so I downed him with a hand-spike and chucked him overboard. They shoved me into irons so's to hand me over to the authorities. Lots of sharks in Sydney Harbour, so there wasn't much chance for the mate."

"Of course if you knocked him on the head and threw him into the harbour, he was either drowned or eaten by sharks? How did you escape the consequences of your crime?"

"Well, you see, it was this way——"

The guard cried out "Edminton, Edminton," and my nautical young man, after imploring a hurried blessing on his own optics, exclaimed: "This is my station," flung open the carriage-door and disappeared into the capacious bosom of his family, the members of which awaited the blood-stained desperado.

Another of our stock characters is the inexperienced youth in love with a bad woman whom he does not know to be bad, and the novelist lets himself go, although he is sometimes outdone by real incidents which seem to him too improbable

to use in a story. Here is a true story about a bad woman—a woman of the social world—who was very much amused at being taken seriously by a boy who loved her. "Tell me all about it," she would say to him. "Explain what you feel, why you love me, why you believe in me. Don't you see I'm courted and admired—a social force—that men flock round me everywhere I go?"

"Oh yes," said the boy. "I see all that. But you're an angel of goodness and can't help men liking you. If I were to lose faith in you I'd kill myself."

"Ah," she rejoined, "that's what they all say. I know better. You might doubt me, but you would live on."

One afternoon he had good cause to doubt her, inasmuch as he learned of her intrigue with a notorious man about town, and that evening she received a note from him: "Good-bye. If I lived on I might doubt; it's better to die and—believe!"

That night, an hour later, they told her of the *accident*, and she wrote a touching little paragraph about it for the Society papers before going out to sup with her lover.

The man in love is a very difficult character to depict in fiction, for it is always so easy to make him appear to be an ass; although, as a rule, his creator has a sneaking likeness for him, and laughs at him instead of trying to show the nature of the tragedy which has so suddenly overtaken him. With most young men, in fiction and in reality, the falling in love is very sudden.

One morning the average man gets up, lights a cigarette, roams round his rooms in all the ease of unshaven countenance and dressing-gown. Then he dresses and shaves and goes out and meets *her!*

There may be a hundred other women in the park, or

room, or tennis ground where the tragedy begins. When the lights are low he comes back and is low also. Wonders how men can be such brutes as to want dinner; thinks his life has been mis-spent; that he is unworthy to touch her hand; that he has wallowed in the fleshpots, and here is a way out of them. And if his nature be noble and sweet and true, if he has hitherto drifted adown the stream of circumstance because his fellows have also drifted, then, with the deepening tide of his passion, the old spirit of knight-errantry descends upon him, clothes him in a mantle of white samite, mystic, wonderful. And slowly out of this torrent of bewilderment and impulse and devotion is born a new man—a man with a soul—a man who can dare all things, do all things, endure all things, for the sake of the woman whom he loves. At the baptism of her touch he becomes whole, and shapes his life to nobler ends. Even if he cannot marry her, he is the better for his passion. Such a love endures until the leaves of the Judgment Book unroll: for it laughs to scorn the pitiful fools and knaves who boast of infidelity, the "male hogs in armour," as Kingsley calls them, who look upon women as toys, the sport of an idle hour, rather than the spiritual force which leavens the world and renders it an endurable and joyous dwelling-place.

Perhaps, on the whole, the greatest success of the modern novelist is his villain, for it is more than a little difficult to invent a really original villain. Before Wilkie Collins hit upon fat Count Fosco with his white mice, lean villains were the novelist's stock characters, villains who were dark and saturnine and pursued the virtuous heroine with implacable hostility and a cigar (in later days a cigarette—at the Adelphi) in their mouths. Even in their last moments, the villains, with a prescience of what was ultimately in store for them,

smoked. I once flattered myself on having invented a nice villain, but rather overdid it, for someone wrote to me to know why I did not kill off the insipid hero and let the villain (he did not know that he was really the villain) marry the heroine. Another correspondent wrote : " Please, mister, don't be so ard on the pore vilyuns. They as their livins to get same as us."

In his " Avowals," George Moore says that it is incredible to him that a man should be able to arrange his composition beforehand and execute it sentence by sentence. But, difficult as it is, it has to be done ; and your heroine and hero, villain and mother-in-law, ought to be put together so that their characters fit with the precision of a Chinese puzzle. Very often they do not. That is our misfortune, a misfortune which readers speedily detect and condemn.

CHAPTER XVI

THE WHITEFRIARS' CLUB

I HAVE just passed the vendor of roasted chestnuts who takes his stand by the public-house before you reach Anderton's Hotel in Fleet Street. Somehow, that smell of roasted chestnuts at once touches a sympathetic chord after a long absence from the purlieus where chestnuts abound. Of course, in another sense, Fleet Street is the home of "chestnuts." They grow there during the "silly season" in ripe luxuriance. But I am writing of the genuine article and not the one manufactured by scribes in search of "copy."

Dozens of books have been written about Fleet Street, all more or less convincing, and generally "from the inside." Somehow, they never seem to get between their covers the odour of those chestnuts, the most characteristic scent of Fleet Street. In my young days, one could purchase a handful of chestnuts, "all 'ot" for a penny; since the war, the price is twopence for five—in a little paper bag. A good deal of Fleet Street journalism has the unsubstantial paper bag thrown in to compensate for the paucity of chestnuts.

But after you have purchased your twopennyworth of chestnuts and nakedly and unashamedly eaten them *pro bono publico*, turn aside with me into Anderton's to the home of theWhite Friars on the first floor, with its balcony where the privileged few can see the Lord Mayor's Show. At the

last Show I was unable to get into Anderton's owing to the crush, and had it not been for the good offices of a coster lady who obligingly made way for me on a box, I should have missed seeing the nobleman (the City Marshal) whom she graphically described as "the bloke with the feathers." I would not have missed "the bloke with the feathers" for any money. He is as much an essential part of the Show as the Lord Mayor's coach and its fiery steeds.

As you enter the gloomy passage of Anderton's, you may chance to see the editor of *Punch* and other celebrities in quest of their hurried mid-day meal. Then you go up the stairs, turn to the right down a long softly-carpeted passage and find yourself between two doors, the one labelled "Whitefriars" and the other "The Magic Circle." The frequenters of the latter are conjurors and wizards who meet there to try new tricks and arrange that they shall not "queer each other's pitches." Sometimes weird flashes of coloured light float through the keyhole to the murmur of subdued applause; at others, there is a sound as of falling bodies on the carpet and the holy White Friars tremble in their shoes lest the sleight-of-hand men should be murdering a too-successful rival.

The home of the Friars is a big lofty room with leather couches all round the walls. Some of the couches have seen better days and badly require re-stuffing. Above the couches are ranged in solemn majesty the portraits of living and dead Friars. Until you become used to them, it is rather a ghastly business to sit under the pictorial presentments of men whom you have liked but who have long since departed to the Land of the Ponema, and whose portraits, owing to defective chemicals, are rapidly turning blue. They rather remind me of a friend of mine who had a picture of Count Ugolino and family over his dining-room sideboard. Count

Ugolino and his family, if you recollect, were shut up in a dungeon and given nothing to eat, so they lunched off one another. When my friend was asked why this gruesome work of art was suspended over his sideboard, he explained that he put it there to give him an appetite. Presumably, the secretary of the Whitefriars' was actuated by the same laudable motive in leaving the portraits of defunct members on the walls.

The club represents a survival of what was truest and best in the old Bohemian life of London, and was founded in 1868 by a band of journalists and artists who met together to discuss the affairs of the universe over a tankard and a pipe. Its home was then, as now, within the sanctuary of Alsatia, a neighbourhood associated by tradition with the white-robed Carmelites who gave their name to that precinct adjoining the great highway of letters called Fleet Street.

Among the early Friars were such men as Tom Hood, William Sawyer, Joseph Knight, Barry Sullivan, Thomas Archer, Ashby Sterry, Godfrey Turner, William Black, and Charles Gibbon. Very soon the Club attracted the attention of the best men in Fleet Street, and most of them became members or regular visitors. It is still essentially a brotherhood of journalists; but its constitution has changed with the changing times, its aims have expanded with its membership, and it has grown to be what it now is, one of the chief centres of literary activity in the Metropolis.

It is the habit of the Committee to invite to the Friday dinners as a special guest of the Club an eminent author, artist, actor, traveller, or man of affairs; and in responding to the toast of his health proposed by the Prior of the evening, the guest opens a conversational debate on some given topic of common interest and importance.

Nor is the feminine element in literary production wholly forgotten. Twice every year the White Friars welcome ladies to their more elaborate banquets, such literary stars as Miss Marie Corelli, Mrs. Baillie Reynolds, Lucas Malet, Mrs. Steel, Sarah Grand, and many others.

Probably there is no club in London in which the spirit of fraternal comradeship prevails in a more marked degree.

In the beginning of things, some gifted member composed a ritual for the Club dinner which more than once has nearly caused bloodshed among the Friars, so tangled and twisted and complicated is it. Seasoned Friars make it a point of honour to try to say the ritual off by heart, and the most exciting feature of the evening is when a proud Prior, dressed in a little brief authority, tries to give it trippingly without a breakdown. As a rule, he fails with ignominy. This is the ritual:

"Friars and Guests—By this wine we commemorate the White Friars of old, fortified with spirit—the spirit of admiration for their services to charity and good learning—and sweetened by sympathy for those who, broken by fortune, dwell in Alsatia. It is left for me, as Prior of the day, to add the cordial—a cordial welcome to the guests of the brotherhood assembled at our board. Gentlemen, I bid a hearty welcome to you all, and invite you to join with the brothers of a gracious Order in drinking to the prosperity of the Whitefriars' Club."

Former Priors listen to this with a superior smile and anxiously jot down the mistakes made by the Prior for the evening. And he, knowing what they are doing, generally does make mistakes. Once I failed ignominiously and was so incensed by my failure that I took the printed paper away with me on a holiday and devoted a fortnight's hard study

to mastering it. Then I tried it on a family of sea-gulls, who, under the impression that it was a prelude to sprats, gave me a "cordial welcome," a welcome which changed to shrill derisive pipings when the sprats failed to materialise. Now, Sir Arthur Spurgeon, A. D. Power, and myself hold the cup for being able to recite the ritual without a mistake, though I am morally certain that on some important occasion we shall all break down and be exposed to the ill-concealed rejoicing of former Priors who have not reached the lofty height to which we have so laboriously climbed.

Before the war we lunched at Anderton's three times a week. During the war we partook of Spartan fare on Mondays only, assisted by the genial club waiter "Robert" (he has no surname), who is rather deaf, and, as he reads out the menu informs himself that, in his opinion, the dishes do not correspond in merit to war prices. When he thinks he is alone, it is a great pleasure to me to hear him declare that he would not touch such and such a dish if it were offered him for nothing. But then, it is given to waiters to know the innermost secrets of hotel kitchens. Perhaps it is as well that the persons who eat the meals remain in happy ignorance of those secrets. Sir Francis Gould, before his retirement into the country (he was succeeded by the genial and kindly Joseph Shaylor), acted as president at lunch, and woe betide the unfortunate individual who ignorantly dared to seat himself in the presidential chair. By some strange mischance a black-beetle once mistook my coffee-cup for a bath and got into it. Sir Francis at once detected the intruder and sternly demanded of Robert how the beetle got there.

Robert, although strongly attached to Sir Francis, was very much afraid of him. "How did it get there, Sir Francis, Sir Francis, sir ?" he helplessly speculated.

"Yes. How did it get there, Robert?"

"Well, you see, Sir Francis, Sir Francis, sir, the beetle got into the coffee-pot."

"But *how* did it get into the coffee-pot?"

"I don't know, Sir Francis, Sir Francis, sir, but it *did* get there."

"Any fool can see that."

"And then, Sir Francis, Sir Francis, sir, I s'pose it went down the spout, and tumbled into the coffee-cup, Sir Francis, Sir Francis, sir."

"Don't be a fool, Robert," was the choleric rejoinder, although there was a twinkle in the eyes of "Sir Francis, Sir Francis, sir."

Robert brooded over this in silence, and when I was paying my bill put his hand up to his mouth as he glanced at the president. "I'm sorry, deeply sorry, you got that beetle in your coffee, sir. I wish it was 'im!"

At this lunch we vary in number from half a dozen to a dozen, Sir Arthur Spurgeon, Joseph and Harold Shaylor, Clement K. Shorter, W. N. Shansfield (the indefatigable secretary), Morgan de Groot, Francis Aitken, W. H. Helm, Cyril Gamon, Walter Jerrold, and others. Although Friar Shorter rather enjoys literary rows, in our midst he is the most genial and kindly of men, and brings us rare books to look at, books which he is now housing in a very fine library at Great Missenden, and all the latest Parisian papers. Friar Joseph Shaylor, who does a great deal for the Club, wrote that delightful volume "The Fascination of Books." He once sent an article to the editor of the *Nineteenth Century* and received the following letter from Mr. James Knowles:

"The fact is, I was and am rather wishful to have a few words' chat about it with yourself before publishing it. I

find it full of interest, but I want to suggest *one or two* things which in my opinion might add to its value, but I cannot well do this without an interview."

After an hour's chat, Mr. Knowles came to the article, which had been put into type. Shaylor looked at it in dismay, for it was pencil-marked top, bottom, and round every page. Knowles took it up. "There, you see, I have read your article with some results." He began a kindly criticism of omissions and commissions and eventually said : "Now what I want you to do is to take the article back and rewrite many parts of it so that it can be read by those who do not know so much about the subject as you do." The "one or two things" had resulted in Shaylor's practically re-writing the whole article.

CHAPTER XVII

THE WHITEFRIARS' DINNERS

Sir W. Robertson Nicoll discoursed learnedly at one of our dinners on the subject of reviews and talked about the honestly enthusiastic review. As he has reviewed more books than any other living man, and possesses as marvellous a memory as Macaulay, I was much interested. He declared that there is no such pleasure in a reviewer's life as when he comes across a book of sterling merit by an author previously unknown to him. Then he legitimately enjoys to the full the noble pleasure of praising. By the very nature of the case, it is not a common experience. To find a sovereign where you expected to find at most sixpence is a surprise. But open and appreciative minds do sometimes come on this pleasure, and it is a pleasure which often leads to much. It is no easy matter for a new writer, however gifted, to make his way. If there is stuff in him, he will come to his own by degrees, but he may be spared many a heart-ache by a strong and cordial word of praise at the right time. The happy reviewer who has a chance of speaking this word may occasionally find that his life has been enriched by a precious friendship.

At the next dinner we criticised Dr. Johnson, and a story was told of the great lexicographer going to see his friend Chambers at Oxford. When they were walking in Chambers' garden, Johnson observed Chambers picking up snails and

throwing them over the wall into his neighbour's garden. "Sir," said Dr. Johnson, "that is a very unneighbourly thing to do." "Oh," said Chambers, "but my neighbour is a dissenter." "Pitch away, sir," said Dr. Johnson. "Pitch away."

One night Sir Anthony Hope Hawkins held forth on literature of various kinds—good literature, bad literature, and election literature. One great art in writing election literature was to stop quotations at the opportune moment. Next to election literature came bad literature. Anyone who wanted to write good literature must die. Great literature was very rare, and was generally written by dead men. If written by living men it was usually found that it was written by them fifteen years ago, and that they had never written any good literature since. There was probably nothing so pathetic as the young man starting out in life to write good literature. The next thing to a good book was a really bad one.

General Sir W. F. Butler, the celebrated author of "The Great Lone Land," "The Last of the Sioux," and many other works of North American Indian life, dined with us one night. As the speeches hung fire a little, it occurred to me when called upon to speak to adopt the phraseology of my Red Indian friends. "Why," I pathetically asked General Butler, "has my White Father deserted our young men and squaws, and fled across the Great Waters in the fire canoe of the Paleface? Why has he forsaken Maid of the Falling Dew, White Rabbit-Tail, Pine Leaf, and Minnehaha and his papooses to dwell for ever with the White Man? His squaws cover their faces with ashes, his papooses have no one to teach them to bend the bow or how to become great warriors. No more does he sit at the council fire of his Red Brothers and smoke with

them the calumet of peace. Our hearts are sad, for there is no more any buffalo meat in our wigwams, and the White Man robs us of our furs. Why does not my White Father return to gladden the hearts of his Red Children ? Waugh ! I have spoken."

In answer to this impassioned outburst, General Butler passed me down a little note. "Dear Mr. Burgin, There weren't any Rabbit Tails or Minnehahas in my tent ; consequently, there weren't any papooses either ; and I wish with all my heart that I could return to my Red Brothers."

Another time we discussed Decadent Fiction, and Alfred Sutro told a story of Verlaine. He was once at a meeting where Verlaine, asked to talk about modern French poets, began by saying : "As there is only one modern French poet of any importance, I will now talk about myself." Verlaine had a friend called Bibi la Purée, who had one failing : he could never resist walking off with his friend's umbrella. After Verlaine's death, his friends got up a subscription for Bibi and gave him a banquet. Someone alluded to Bibi as a reformed character. Bibi was so touched by this unexpected tribute to his moral worth that he went out of the room in order to hide his emotion and disappeared with twenty-six umbrellas.

The biographer of Lord Beaconsfield, Mr. W. F. Monypenny, talked to us of Disraeli as a fascinating and astonishing character on the stage of life. In Disraeli's complexity were to be found the strands of an iron will, a very firm grasp of the essential facts of life, and a vivacity that caused Robert Louis Stevenson to describe him in his old age as "one of the very brightest and best-preserved youths of the time." The last time I visited Lord Beaconsfield's tomb someone had planted it with flaming geraniums, and they seemed to me to

express his love of colour very adequately. Which reminds me of a letter Theodore Watts-Dunton once wrote to an aggrieved man who could not get any replies to his communications: "My dear Mr.—— If Mr. Swinburne has not acknowledged the receipt of your poem his silence must be taken to be adequate."

From time to time we wandered into a discussion on "Literature." The only thing I can remember about it is that just after the "Apologia" was written, Scott Stokes said to Cardinal Newman, "Father, where did you get your style?" Newman looked at him. "Boy, I have no style. All my life I have tried to think out clearly what I know, what I see, what I feel; and to put it into the simplest and clearest words. That is all my style." Newman added: "To produce literature you must first of all know what you are writing about; write in as simple words as you can; cut out the purple patches; be sincere without being dull; grip the subject before you; feel it, and translate it not into the tall words which are the disgrace of modern journalism, but the simple English our fathers have handed down to us."

The modern novel came in for a castigation one evening—it is so easy to "pitch into" modern novels. But the "pitching into" process is comparatively mild to what it used to be. On turning over some old Quarterlies the other day, I read what a writer in 1809 thought of a young woman who had written a novel:

"She has evidently written more than she has read, and read more than she has thought. But this is beginning at the wrong end. If we were happy enough to be in her confidence, we would advise the immediate purchase of a spelling-book, of which she stands in great need; to this, in due process of time, might be added a pocket dictionary; she might take a few lessons in easy joined-hand, in order to become legible; if, after this, she could be persuaded to exchange her idle raptures for common sense, practise a little

self-denial, and gather a few precepts of humility from an old-fashioned book, which, although it does not seem to have lately fallen in her way, may yet, we think, be found in some corner of her study, she might then hope to prove, not indeed a good writer of novels, but a useful friend, a faithful wife, a tender mother, and a respectable and happy mistress of a family."

"Whaur's your modern 'slater' the noo?"

The Very Rev. Dean Inge visited us one night and was not at all gloomy, although he thought that we no longer looked with deference to Greece and Rome, but were rather like the Louvain Principal: "You see me, young man; I never learnt Greek, and I don't find that I have ever missed it. I have had a doctor's cap and gown without Greek; I have ten thousand florins a year without Greek; and, in short, as I don't know Greek, I do not believe there is any good in it."

Sir R. D. Muir, senior prosecuting counsel for the Treasury, once enlightened our proceedings with stories about criminals and the public. The late Justice Hawkins' methods were very original. Before sentencing a prisoner, he always sent for a record of the prisoner's convictions, allotted what he thought was the just punishment to each crime on the list, opened a debtor and creditor account with the prisoner, added his own sentence, deducted one from the other, and passed the balance of time on to the prisoner for his sentence. There was also the old story of the counsel who drew such a moving picture of his client's innocence when tried for a particularly atrocious murder that he himself wept, the judge wept, and the jailer wept. The prisoner only remained unmoved. As he left the dock, after having had sentence of death passed upon him, he pointed to his counsel, who was still drying his eyes, and said to the jailer, "Dismal beggar, ain't he?"

A friend of mine was once staying at a country house at

election time, and noticed a sad-looking man who seemed as dejected as the counsel in Sir R. D. Muir's story. "Who is he?" he asked his host. "That's the speaker this evening." "There's only one sadder-looking man in the room. Who's he?" "Oh, he's the speaker's brother, who has heard him make the same speech a dozen times. That's why he's so sad."

There were several anecdotes that evening. A girl had two lovers, one very tall, the other very short. She could not decide which of them to marry. At last she made up her mind. "I'm going to marry the tall one, because if he dies and I marry again, I may marry a short man and can have my first husband's things cut down to fit him."

Another point was that lawyers have to be prepared for every emergency, like the man who had never made a speech in his life and was forced to do so at a dinner. He recited it beforehand to his wife. When he came back after delivering his speech, "How did it go?" she asked anxiously. "Oh, moving, soothing, satisfying. During the first ten minutes, half of my audience moved out, during the second ten minutes the other half went to sleep, and I knew that everyone was satisfied, because as I came away I heard one man say, 'We've had enough of that d——d fool.'"

At a discussion on the influence of criticism on fiction, W. B. Maxwell unburdened his soul. His last book had got him into trouble with the critics and his publisher sent for him and said: "I don't know whether what is being said is right or wrong, but it is very serious for me. If you go on like this, in future *I shall have to read your books myself.*" On the same night, James Douglas contended that every review should be accompanied by the writer's name and address. In that case, presents of game and cigars might find their way to the critic instead of to his editor.

With Sir Henry Lucy's (Toby, M.P.) assistance, we had a shot at the New Journalism, and someone quoted a story of his about a deaf member of Parliament, the father of Mr. Thomasson, the proprietor of the defunct *Tribune*. On one occasion Lord Sherbrooke(formerly Mr. Robert Lowe) revisited the scene of his former triumphs. He happened to be in the Peers Gallery when a terrible bore was addressing the House, including Mr. Thomasson with his ear-trumpet. Lord Sherbrooke remarked, "Look at that fool flinging away his natural advantages." Another man told the story of a husband taking his wife to a bookseller's shop and the bookseller offered her a book called "Five Weeks" or something of the sort, which the husband thought highly improper. Whilst he indignantly expostulated with the bookseller, his wife plucked him by the sleeve. "Don't give yourself away like that. I've already read it." A friend of mine once asked for this same book under the impression that the title was "Three Days." "Oh no, madame," an earnest young shopman in spectacles assured her. "I am firmly convinced from my own knowledge of the world that you *couldn't* get all that in, in three days."

Richard Whiteing, almost the doyen of the Club, tells a story about us in "My Harvest"

"The Whitefriars, never more than a dining club, was my middle course. It had its day in Bohemia, but, reorganised as it is now, it is something of a debating society tempered by a dinner. There is a subject for discussion and a 'celebrity'—usually from the outside—as the opener. Its only blemish in the nature of the case is that it is sometimes a little too improving for the mind, to the exclusion of all chance of exchanging a word with one's neighbour. I hope I shall never forget the evening when Max O'Rell was in the chair, and Rapson, the great Orientalist, was the guest of the evening. At the Museum he belonged to the Department of Coins and Medals; and Max O'Rell wanted to say something nice about him as a numismatist. With his imperfect knowledge of the niceties of our tongue, he could manage it only in this way: 'Gentlemen, we are honoured to-night with the presence of a well-known coiner.'"

Although it was a very risky thing to do, the mysterious "Man who dined with the Kaiser" came to us one evening. No one seems to have seen him since that banquet. What interested me chiefly was the late Spencer Leigh Hughes' description of the ex-Kaiser in Palestine:

"It was stated that he tried to walk on the water. Somebody told him that somebody else had done it in that part of the world a long time ago. When the Kaiser failed he did not believe this. I saw him coming in dressed very much like one of the men who used to ride in the Lord Mayor's Show, or still more like a Drury Lane Crusader, with gleaming helmet and white robes. He had a haughty expression, as though saying: 'I am not only the limit but absolutely It.' I heard him preach a sermon in the church. He walked the goose step up the church, armed to the teeth, and the choir sang: 'Rejoice, Daughter of Zion, behold thy King cometh unto thee.' The Kaiser saluted at these words."

A very different guest from our mysterious one (he is popularly supposed to have been murdered by German spies) was the late Rt. Hon. Will Crooks, M.P., a fat little man with a marvellously magnetic power of winning his audience. He once saw a lady walk up to a flower-girl in Piccadilly Circus, near the fountain, and ask her for a shilling's worth of flowers. After the purchase, the lady said: "Will you be here on Wednesday next, as I shall want half-a-crown's worth for my daughter; she is coming out on that day." "She shall have the best in the market, mum," said the flower-seller. "What's she been in for?"

Then we invented "The Friars' Club" for the Club Journal, wherein various members discussed some set subject. In desperation, I started "Are Novels Worth Writing?" and no one agreed on the point. It seemed to me that it all depends upon the way you look at it. You have the author's, the publisher's, and the reader's respective points of view. They all differ. The author wants to pay his butcher's bill

—in that event, the butcher sometimes says that novels are worth writing; the publisher does not generally side with the butcher; and the reader is influenced by the weather, his digestion, his—or her—love affairs, and a thousand other things. I once knew an invalid old gentleman who was very angry when lions were not shot by distinguished travellers in what he considered the proper way. He said that he could shoot them so much better himself; and that is the average reader's point of view.

Roughly speaking, it takes at least a hundred *Times*' columns to make an average novel. Besides, the worst novel-writer in the world is a benefactor to it. If you do not like him, there is always the whole-hearted pleasure of damning him. Who else can make one forget life's sorrows? Who else can charm and soothe, especially after a heavy lunch, and diminish the anxieties of our daily lives? On the whole, it is a fine thing to be happy enough to have written a novel worth reading. It is a sweet, a good, and a gracious thing to know that the novelist has helped his fellows, has made friends of them, has never stooped to the base, the sordid, the mean. Anthony Trollope once obtained the opinion of a publisher's foreman on this point when, quite unknown, he took a MS. to a printing house.

"A novel is it, sir?" dubiously asked the foreman.

"Yes," Trollope answered, "a novel."

"It all depends on the subject," said the foreman, with a thoughtful and judicious frown.

Sir Francis Carruthers Gould, one of our prominent Friars, thinks that club life tends to destroy one's individuality. Where else could I have heard so many stories, made so many friends, have met such good fellows, if I had not been fortunate enough to belong to the Whitefriars'? Sir Francis has enjoyed

many Whitefriars' dinners, but, in his greatly to be regretted withdrawal to the country, he finds that a cold pasty munched in remote isolation on a heather-covered slope of Exmoor helps him more than club life. Another of our Friars has been forced by the exigencies of Fate to retire to the classic shades of the Charterhouse. It is a delightful spot but, though he is very happy there, he often regrets that he cannot get down to meet his old Fleet Street friends and settle the affairs of the world with them.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE METHODS OF AUTHORS

When one has been reading an interesting book, it is equally interesting to know how its author works. The late Sir Walter Besant, for instance, spent the last twenty-five years of his life in writing stories and dreaming dreams, several of which, the People's Palace to wit, have become actual facts. In this pursuit of written dreams the professional very soon discovers that, except at unusual moments, imaginative work cannot be carried on profitably for more than about three hours a day. Though one may live in the society of unreal people, one must not converse with them, and take notes of what they say or do, for more than three or four hours at a time. Sir Walter Besant, therefore, was accustomed to give his morning—when the house was perfectly quiet and his brain at its clearest and strongest—to fiction work, and sat in his study most days—not every day—from nine o'clock until at least half-past twelve. Then he left his tale half told, and generally went into town for lunch. His afternoon, until five or six, was almost always given up to the new "Survey of London." At seven he dined, at half-past eight wrote letters, corrected proofs, or looked up little points. Towards ten he took his one pipe, with a book or a talk, and the whiskey and potash which finished the day. He always went to bed at eleven and breakfasted at eight. Sometimes, by way of an almost painful recreation, he looked

over his youthful attempts at verse. "I've a whole drawerful," he once told me. "I know they're rubbish, but they represent a time when they were very dear to me. Every young man who is worth anything as a writer begins with verse and believes in his verses. When the time comes that he can no longer believe in them, the disillusion is a sad awakening, for he realises that Tennyson and Browning and all the rest of them need no longer fear a possible rival."

Another industrious worker is Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, who was much amazed when I once confessed to him that I wrote stories in the Brighton train. He scorns the use of the typewriter and writes his own "copy" in a firm, clear, neat hand, with thick up-and-down strokes. Sir Arthur's day's work varies from a thousand to two thousand five hundred words. When he is engaged on a book he "does his stretch" pretty regularly every day. If he is writing about any epoch he begins by reading every book that bears upon it. This he usually does while he is writing another book. He takes copious notes, and then rearranges them in long lists under the heading of the different characters, getting, for example, everything about archery under the heading of "archer," and everything about a knight or a monk under those headings. In this way, if he has a conversation between a knight and an archer, having his two lists in front of him he can hope to make each man talk within his own limits. Once or twice I have gathered from him that he believes the most permanent fiction to be that which is based, or leans most upon, fact, as Defoe does in "Robinson Crusoe" or Charles Reade in all his great novels.

To turn to another branch of fiction, Sir Rider Haggard also has his own methods of working. He is supposed to begin at ten-thirty every morning, but it is sometimes as

late as eleven before he gets fairly to work. He dictates to a secretary, who uses a typewriter and taps down the "copy" as the author speaks it. Sir Rider Haggard continues dictating until lunch-time, breaks off for a brief interval, and dictates for two and a half hours after lunch. His memory is so marvellous that he never uses any notes. The typewriter clicks away as fast as possible without disconcerting him. Sir Rider keeps a little in advance of it and likes to work five hours a day. He leaves off work just in time to dress for dinner and always does an hour's work after dinner —that is to say, when he is regularly at work on a book—if he has not made up his five hours. He works very quickly, dictates freely, and, once he has his plot in his head, goes straight on, with very few alterations.

I am merely picking out a few authors whom I know, or with whom I have come in contact, and do not pretend to place them with regard to seniority or position. Such a task would take a lifetime and displease them all. I "happened along" one day to the house of my friend Zangwill and obtained a very good insight into his way of working. Most of his work is done away from London, but when there he writes at a large table in his study, covered a foot deep with litter, amid which each page of "copy" gets lost as soon as written. A great search is thus entailed at the end of each sitting. Once the search was prolonged for hours because an important page could not be found. At last, when the grey dawn came creeping in, making the gas-light tawdry, and his own and his brother's anxious faces weird and haggard, it was discovered that he had inadvertently written on both sides of a sheet; on the bottom side of this sheet was the thing for which they were looking. Zangwill's brother, the author of "A Drama in Dutch" sits at the other end of the same table.

He is methodical and stipulates that the litter is not to encroach on his own clear space. With this object in view, he makes a line of demarcation, but as Israel Zangwill warms to his work the space becomes smaller and smaller, and Louis Zangwill's work is driven to the floor. When he begins to recover lost ground, it is only to be again dispossessed.

Whilst working, the brothers discuss metaphysics—an unnatural practice at the best—and their busiest time in the study is from ten p.m. to three a.m. When I met Zangwill just after he had finished "The Children of the Ghetto," he had wasted away to an unnaturally brilliant-eyed shadow, with hollow cheeks and loosely-fitting clothes. But he picked up again in a few weeks. He has adopted that most dangerous of all systems of writing, *i.e.*, of being absorbed in a book until it is finished, to the utter exclusion of everything else. It burns and holds and eats into him, and until it is on paper he knows no rest. People style him a humorist; but there is little humour in his method of work; it would kill most men in a very short time. I once sent him a poor photograph of himself to autograph for me, and he wrote under it: "Can this be I—Zangwill?" Once Andrew Lang wrote to him about something and this was his reply:

"If you, Lang, will,
I, Zang, will."

Stanley Weyman, when he does write nowadays, works very slowly. He begins with a rough copy of a page or two, seldom more, makes a fair copy of it, and so on to the next paragraph. He never does more than a thousand words a day; sometimes it is less. It is a common experience with him to find that the story leaves the lines on which he has planned it; a minor character sometimes has an unpleasant

knack of forcing himself into prominence, whilst the unfortunate "leading gentleman" is left in the background. Mr. Weyman generally writes in the morning between five and seven; and seldom sits down to work without wanting to groan.

Sir Anthony Hope (Hawkins) goes down to his Chambers at ten; stays there until four—minus lunch, which in itself is not a particularly wise thing to do—and, as he admits, half the day he gets something done and the other half he does not. And when he does not arrive at results, his temper is bad. Sometimes he is quick; sometimes slow; and the work never comes out as well as he thought it was going to be—which is a very good sign, for your self-satisfied author will never do any better, whilst your modest one, though always on the rack, perpetually strives to improve.

Gissing once told me that there was nothing noteworthy in his working methods. The late Harold Frederic claimed (his own pen had "always been on the side of the angels") that the fact Gissing caught the attention of the novel-reading class was a very welcome sign; but he could not understand why "Unclassed" should have attracted so little attention when it first appeared. Later on, the melancholy vein in which it was written might have made his fortune. Literary production always caused Gissing a great deal of trouble, and more than half of what he wrote went into the fire—with maledictions; in view of the long hours he spent at work, his output amounted to very little. The first volume of one of his earlier works was written seven times. "New Grub Street" was planned and written in seven weeks—because it had to be. His own view of his work was expressed in one disparaging phrase—"Dreary stuff!"

Grant Allen's method of work was as original as himself.

On the summit of his hill-top he toiled regularly every day from nine until twelve, and from four to seven, writing everything with great deliberation and never beginning a story until he had settled every chapter and every episode, and even made up the principal conversations in his own mind. He then told the whole thing to his wife and listened to her criticisms. After that he began and wrote the first rough draft, believing that "go" counted for everything. He next revised four or five times over, considering separately every chapter, every episode, every paragraph, every speech; looked at every verb, strengthened every adjective, sought for more picturesque nouns, more vivid epithets. And he also took infinite pains with his style, correcting and revising until hardly a word of the rough draft remained unaltered.

That most witty, genial, and kind-hearted of Irishmen, Frankfort Moore, has now settled down permanently in an old mansion within the grounds of Lewes Castle, in company with his curios, old oak, and young children. He was once devoted to Persian cats, but when he married for the second time, and was blessed with many babes, a friend of mine went to see him, and found him standing on a flower-bed underneath the nursery window, whilst his eldest daughter, aged about five, sprinkled water down on him from the window. "This is better than cats," he explained. "If I were an author I wouldn't like to have my children throw cold water on me," retorted the visitor.

When he is not gardening, Frankfort Moore plans and avoids work very much in the usual way. If want, as he puts it, compels him to write a novel, he usually spends a couple of hours after breakfast trying to persuade himself that he has important business elsewhere, so that when at last he does sit down in the easiest of chairs, in the front of the desk of his

literary machine, the clock is usually striking twelve. His first day at a new novel is easy enough ; the second is always dreadful ; the fourth, fifth, sixth, and so to the fortieth are alike in length of production ; and on the evening of the fortieth day, having written 120,000 words, there is no need for him to do any more. He rolls up his pages, posts them, and keeps on wondering what the whole thing is about. In six weeks the critics tell him.

Frankfort Moore was once passing an old dealer's shop and saw a zinc bath full of sawdust, with, here and there, little bits of pink glass sticking out. He purchased the bath and its contents for half a crown, spent days putting the pieces of pink glass together, and the result was a magnificent Venetian candelabra perfect in every detail and worth a fabulous sum.

When he can, Eden Phillpotts likes to write two or three thousand words a day. Short stories of plot and intrigue are not difficult to him, and have to be produced because they are wanted ; but the only fiction he does with all his heart is the novel of character. In such stories, he is not happy until the characters run away with him. He thinks of half a dozen persons revolving round each other, gets them alive in his mind, and then begins to write about them—following, not leading. In the novel of character he is keenly alive to the danger of getting a strong plot and then beginning to write before he is satisfied whether he can produce live men and women to play the story. One year he did three months' work on a novel, only to find himself faced with a dozen grinning dummies who would not move a leg or think a thought for him—there was not an ounce of circulating blood in the whole crew. This shows the danger of work where you want to fit cut and dried incidents with puppets, instead of

getting the puppets first, and seeing whether there is that in them which will lead to valuable incident. He works with his pen at any time—by daylight for choice.

We met often when Phillpotts was rehearsing his first play and anxious to succeed. He wrote another play in conjunction with Jerome, and of late years has turned his attention to further dramatic work. Hereditary gout sometimes interferes with his work, and all his spare time is taken up with his beautiful garden near Torquay. Plants and shrubs are as dear to him as men and women. Unlike most of us, he still writes verse, and very good verse too.

Eden Phillpotts is the only worthy successor Blackmore has left behind him, and his wonderful Devon rusties run Hardy's and Blackmore's very close. When he was at "Black and White," before going to live in his beloved Devon, he had Arnold Bennett for a colleague. Bennett had gone in for law, abandoned it, and became assistant editor of *Woman*, then editor, and, in 1900, threw up editing to devote himself to literature. All the world knows of his success. A friend once angrily complained to me, "I've been reading one of Bennett's books. Two boys stand on a bridge for several pages, their object being to spit on the heads of the crew of a canal barge coming along in the distance. In several pages more, the barge gradually draws up to the bridge. The boys spit at the crew and—miss! I don't call that realism. From what I know of boys, they'd have succeeded at every shot and the crew would have had their hearts' blood. Someone ought to tell Bennett to be more careful."

These haphazard examples show that every author works in his own way. After all, the public is much more interested in the work itself than in the manner of doing it.

CHAPTER XIX

PLAYS, PLAYWRIGHTS, AND ACTORS

EVERYONE wants to write plays. I was no exception to the rule, so thought that I would modestly begin with a curtain-raiser. It took me about three days to write, and the nice type-written copies, with red ink under every other line, looked very enticing. It seemed to me that there was something about this little play which differentiated it from other little plays. There had been other little plays written but, somehow, this was to inaugurate a new era in the writing of little plays. Of course, theatrical managers would recognise its merit and jump at it. At that time I did not know how difficult it is to get theatrical managers to take exercise of any sort, and it was gradually borne in upon me that they were unable to jump at anything unless the author had previously jumped into a success. I sent the little play round to all the leading managers, and week after week it came back again, its nice brown-paper covers bedraggled and blotted, with beer-stains on them, and pervaded by a smell of stale tobacco. I comforted myself by thinking that at least it had been looked at. Then I started it out on its travels once more and spent a small fortune in stamps. This went on for about three years.

One memorable day, however, Willie Edouin wanted to see me about it. Would I call at the Strand Theatre at six on the next evening? At a quarter to four I was there waiting,

for I was not going to miss such a chance by any lack of punctuality, although I was too much afraid of that awesome person the stage doorkeeper to ask him to let me in. At half-past five, however, when I was chilled to the bone and had been regarded suspiciously by a local policeman, I explained to the saturnine doorkeeper that Mr. Edouin expected me at six, and, after perusing my credentials, he took me to the actor's dressing-room and, looking round to see whether there was anything valuable lying about, turned on the lights.

Mr. Edouin's dressing-room enchanted me. I felt like the poor boy who was taken into a rich woman's drawing-room and asked: "Is this 'Eaving, mother?" Portraits of lovely actresses and celebrated actors, wigs and pigments, and various other articles of theatrical "make-up" were scattered about in profligate profusion. On a chair lay a curious something stuffed with horsehair. I did not know what it was, but the doorkeeper regarded it with reverence. "That's the gov'nor's musk rat," he explained. I think he meant mascot.

Presently Mr. Edouin came in and also regarded me with a certain amount of suspicion. When I faltered out why I was there, his countenance cleared.

"Oh yes," he said cheerily, "that little play of yours. There's a blind woman in it, isn't there?"

"Yes, there is a blind woman in it. You see——"

"To be sure. I knew something in it was blind. But I'm a bit late. P'raps you wouldn't mind helping me on with my false stomach. Never act without that."

The false stomach proved to be the "musk rat" on the chair. It took some time to adjust and seemed to be a sort of lifebelt made out of a burst tyre and stuffed with horsehair.

All the time I was struggling with it, one man put Mr. Edouin's right foot into the right leg of a pair of stage trousers, another put his left foot into the left leg and nearly upset him, whilst the actor pulled on a wig and began to rub grease paint over his face. Just as he finished, the call-boy appeared. "Come again to-morrow at the same time and I'll be a little earlier," said Mr. Edouin as he dashed away.

I came again the next night and the next and the next and the next. Every night I helped Mr. Edouin to put on the "musk rat" and the call-boy arrived on the scene just as we were getting down to business. One evening, having exhausted my patience, I resolved to have something definite and waited in Mr. Edouin's room until the performance was over.

"Now we can talk at last,' he said cheerily. "Nice little thing that play of yours with the blind woman in it, my boy. What d'you want for it?"

I immodestly suggested a hundred pounds.

"You haven't been drinking?" he coldly inquired.

I pardoned the insult and we gradually haggled down to fifteen pounds. "Always buy things outright when I can," he explained. "Saves me such a lot of trouble about authors' fees and all that nonsense. Come again to-morrow night and I'll give you a cheque for that fifteen pounds."

For about a week I came again every night. By this time, the doorkeeper, thanks to sundry tips, looked upon me as a friend. I conceived a rooted dislike to Mr. Edouin's false stomach, for I knew even the stuffing by heart. "Just help me on with this, laddie," he began one night.

I sternly confronted him. "I will not help you on with that accursed thing until I get my fifteen pounds."

"Oh, all right. Why didn't you say so before?" He

hastily scribbled me a cheque, I put it in my pocket, and we shook hands.

"Good-night, my boy. Look in to see me about the production. It wants a lot of thinking over."

I conquered my reluctance to see his false stomach again and promised that I would look in about the production.

I looked in about twice a week for three months.

"The trouble about this little play of yours," he explained one night, "is that it's such a gem in its way that it must be played by first-rate people, and I can't ask Ellen Terry and Irving to come here for a curtain-raiser. She'd make a lovely blind widow, but Irving's not quite young-enough-looking for the boy-hero. Just think of someone else who's a bit cheaper and we'll talk matters over."

At last he gave the play to a relation and it was produced at Ealing, needless to say without Miss Terry and Sir Henry as the blind widow and the boy hero. I was greatly touched when one old lady in front of me said to another old lady in front of me: "It's so natural, my dear, it really might have happened, though I can't help feeling that blind mother's got one eye open all the time and knows who that girl really is." After that it went into the provinces and, for aught I know to the contrary, may be still there.

Encouraged by this gigantic success, Eden Phillpotts and I turned a book of mine into a play, with Eva Moore and charming old Miss Victor in it. Although Miss Victor was over eighty, she was as cheery and bright and amusing as if she were fifteen. But we had great trouble with a Mahatma in this play, for the man who took the part was under the impression that a Mahatma was a kind of Christy Minstrel who ought to say "Golly" and "Yah yah, massa" at frequent intervals. We vainly besought him to read the play. Indeed,

George Groves and Eva Moore and Miss Victor were, I honestly believe, the only three people who did read it. The others took their parts and knew nothing about anything else. The play was produced at a matinee and the critics were kind but said that the last act wanted strengthening. There was a clause in the contract with George Groves, who produced the play, that he was to bring it out after the trial trip "when he was disengaged." We strengthened the last act, but George Groves apparently entered into an engagement for the rest of his life and "Allendale" still remains unknown by the British public.

Great is the uncertainty of play-writing. There are fortunes in it if you make a hit, but it is worth while to go without the fortunes rather than to endure the delays, disappointments and vexations connected with the stage. When Jerome had a play which failed to "catch on," he grimly set his teeth and wrote another. If the critics trampled him in the dust, he got up, shook off the dust, and continued to write plays. He seemed to think that all the bother about plays and actors and actor-managers was an inevitable part of the game. I was very glad, after the appearance of "The Passing of the Third Floor Back," when the Rev. Boyd Carpenter said to me one day: "Tell Jerome, the next time you see him, I'm taking twenty of my young men to see his play and am advising all my clerical friends to do the same."

When compared with theatrical managers, editors are simply angels of light. An actor-manager seldom considers the play as a whole. If there is a star part for himself, it is a good play; if there is not, it is a bad play. And there the matter ends. Sometimes the actor-manager, with an entire disregard for its unities, wants the play remodelled to suit himself. If the author is too conscientious an artist to do

this, the play is rejected. Zangwill has said many wise and witty things, but he never said anything wiser or wittier than when he declared that the actor's conception of the part is that it is greater than the whole.

In theatrical circles there is always an official who "produces" the play. There is a certain amount of reason in this because the stage producer knows his craft; very often the author does not. Mr.——and the late Sir Herbert Tree very often came to loggerheads on the subject, until it is said the exasperated manager forbade the equally exasperated author to enter the theatre. I once saw a play which was a failure because the author would not allow the producer to make any alterations in it. Consequently, the curtain did not come down until twenty minutes too late and the play was damned.

The producer's experience taught him when the curtain ought to come down. So did the audience's. On the whole it seems the wisest course for the author to adopt, unless he has had special opportunities for studying play production, to put the play into the hands of the producer and go away to golf or fish or hunt. Then, if the play fails, he can say that it is the producer's fault and the producer cannot say that it is his. But it is hard to see the offspring of your brains cut about and mutilated, and few playwrights are equal to the spectacle.

I have had some delightful times at the rehearsals of plays and learned to like and esteem the performers. There was a certain musical theatre where the chorus, a light opera chorus, was composed almost exclusively of young ladies and young gentlemen. The proprietress of the theatre looked after them very strictly, and when, one evening, a "blood" sent round a note to the stage door inviting a young

lady—a young lady whom he did not know—to sup with him, she had him turned out of the theatre.

A story is told of the same manageress selecting as stage producer a certain gentleman who was apt to get excited and indulge in unseemly language to the young ladies of the chorus when anything went wrong. "You must promise me, Mr. ——," she said earnestly, "to remember that my young ladies are young ladies, and not use expressions which would make them blush." He promised, but, after a time, the exigencies of rehearsing were too much for him. Something went wrong and he "let himself loose."

"Mr. ——! Oh, Mr. ——! Remember your promise," cried the startled manageress.

"I beg your pardon," he said humbly. "I'd forgotten this was a —— Sunday-school."

One day I was lunching with Penley, the creator of the Rev. Robert Spalding in "Charley's Aunt," and he told me that he attributed his success to playing the part with the utmost seriousness. He used to get letters from clergymen saying what a lesson it was, for he did not abuse the cloth and gave some very good hints to their curates. One vicar wrote that he had tried everything else with a refractory curate, and, in despair, was sending him to see the play. If that did not cure him of certain peculiarities, nothing else would.

The late Clement Scott was a great personality in the theatrical world, but a generation gradually grew up which knew him no more. He was the first to introduce a romantic note in his theatrical criticisms and wrote them with the most marvellous rapidity. After a "first night," everyone turned to the *Daily Telegraph*, and his article had a great influence on the play's future. The last time I met him he stood alone in a corner of the room at a public dinner,

looking very ill and very sad. "Ah," he said mournfully, "there was a time when all the young fellows flocked round me and hung upon my words. Now they don't even know who I am."

I was once writing some articles on how plays are produced, and, though I was duly accredited to the management of a certain theatre, the author of the play was very angry with me for being there. "I wouldn't have let you in," he said bullyingly.

"But I am in and intend to stay in."

"I'm sorry for it," he growled. "We don't want any confounded Press men here."

By the time I had recovered from this unexpected shock, everyone was very kind to me, and I used to sit by Rosina Brandram as she knitted, and hear about theatrical life. Some of the girls (they seemed to spend all their days in the theatre) brought their work-baskets with them. When they were wanted on the stage they jumped up and left me to take care of the baskets.

There was a certain Mr. D—— who had a prominent part in which he was expected to do funny things with bagpipes. We became great friends and he confided to me that he had the reputation of being the worst-tempered actor on the stage. He purposely cultivated this reputation because he found it paid. "For instance," he said, "the author of this play is a bully, who will say rude things to me presently; I shall seem to lose my temper and bowl him over. Keep a look out and see me cow him."

Presently, sure enough, the author said something insufferably rude to Mr. D——and Mr. D——, bagpipes in hand, advanced to the front of the stage. "Look here," he said to the author, "if you dare to speak to me like that again,

I'll come down into the orchestra and break these pipes over your head."

The author retreated in confusion.

"I didn't really intend to break the bagpipes over his head," Mr. D—— explained to me afterwards, "because they're expensive, and I should have had to pay for them; but he knew I'd like to."

Mr. D—— once had an amicable discussion with the head stage carpenter at the Savoy when he was playing there. As the company began to rehearse, he said to this truculent Scot: "Oh, Stewart, for this act we'll have the centre door."

"It's painted oot," said Stewart.

"Very well then, we'll try the palace gate."

"It's painted oot."

"Hang it all, then, use your discretion."

"It's painted oot," returned the imperturbable Scot.

Mr. D—— once heard Rutland Barrington singing for the first time at a rehearsal of one of the Gilbert and Sullivan operas. Barrington invented what he considered an admirable bit of recitative, whereupon Sir Arthur Sullivan at the piano smilingly pulled him up. "Very nice indeed, Barrington, but I didn't write it." Barrington, although he had his own opinion of the alteration, came back to the score.

The play was a great success and the chorus ladies sent me a round robin deploring that success because they would not have the pleasure of seeing me again until the production of its successor. I felt very grateful to them.

One day Jerome came to me in a state of great excitement. "I've a glorious 'scoop,'" he explained. "Bram Stoker has arranged that you're to go to the rehearsals of 'Becket.' Irving's always kept writing men out of the theatre, so

officially he doesn't want to know anything about it. Then, if the other men complain, he can truthfully say he didn't know how you got in. It was vaguely hinted that you, as an old friend of his, were to be the man. The only stipulation he makes is that if you see him coming anywhere, you're to hide, get under a seat or in a corner. Bernard Partridge will do the illustrations. Don't on any account let Irving see you. Terriss and the others don't matter so much, because they'll naturally suppose that Irving does know all about it."

Then began a glorious time. On the occasion of my first visit, the theatre was deserted save by some ghostly caretaker who glided noiselessly about through the shadowy gloom, sliding a brush over the upholstery without looking at it and replacing each covering as he went along. On the stage there appeared two men wearing picturesque soft hats and long coats reaching nearly to the ground. They were Irving and "Handsome Bill Terriss," who was so foully murdered later on at the stage door of a neighbouring theatre. I was sitting in my room at Pearson's the morning after the murder, when an office-boy approached me with the air of one conferring an inestimable favour. "If you'll come over the way with me, sir, I'll show you Mr. Terriss's blood on the doorpost." The man who killed Terriss was half crazy. He had a grievance against Edward Terry, who was looking after the affairs of some theatrical charity, mistook the names, and stabbed poor Terriss to the heart.

Happily unconscious of the future, Terriss chatted gaily with Irving and they got to work.

The rehearsal lasted for three hours and Bernard Partridge sketched busily. Presently Bram Stoker tiptoed up to me where I sat in the darkness. "Do you know what

Irving said to me just now? He has to put his hand on that balustrade as he comes down."

"No. What did he say?"

"He asked me if it were covered with real velvet, and when I said it wasn't, he replied, 'I thought not. You see, Stoker, it doesn't *feel* like real velvet. Have it replaced by real velvet.'"

"Are you going to? It would cost at least a hundred pounds."

"Certainly not. He's relieved his artistic conscience and will soon forget all about it."

The most delicious, the most perfect piece of comedy I have ever seen, was Miss Ellen Terry teaching Terriss his part. "Handsome Bill" was so accustomed to being a breezy stage hero that sometimes his methods were a little out of the picture where more subdued acting was required. She and Terriss were talking about his conception of the part. "Yes," she said musingly, "but I wonder whether Tennyson really meant that. Though it's a brilliant conception, some people would play it this way on such a stage. How would this do?" She repeated the passage in question with the right emphasis, action, and intonation, giving the meaning of the lines fully and clearly. "Don't you think that's the way you would like to do it?"

Terriss agreed that it was the way he had thought of and Miss Terry ended by persuading him that he had suggested all the necessary improvements in the sonorous lines. There was one scene where Terriss had to jump over a table, and he vaulted over it with the agility of a deer. Irving wanted it done differently. "Hadn't you better have something on the table and pick it up before you go over? It looks rather like Lillie Bridge, you know, if you do it that way."

Miss Terry reflected a moment. "What is that jump that, like Mr. Winkle's horse, makes you go sideways as you fly over hurdles?"

To show her, though the method lacked dignity, Terriss "went sideways like Mr. Winkle's horse," and at last it was decided that he should place both hands on the table, spring over, and so lightly up the stairs and exit.

I forget how many times I went to the rehearsals, but they were always profoundly interesting, the last night, that before the full dress rehearsal, being the most absorbing of all. Irving and Miss Ellen Terry pervaded all parts of the house, watching the different lighting effects, and ever I fled before them like a hunted hare. I was the sole representative from the outer world. Like the mad king of Bavaria, I had the performance all to myself. All this gorgeous pageantry was for me alone; all this wealth of action, this story of cruel murder, this work of a great poet—all this was poured into my ears until the tale was told and I walked into the quiet night at three-thirty, quivering with the terrible pain of Becket's ending.

When, with Bernard Partridge's superb illustrations, my article appeared, no one troubled about how I obtained the opportunity for writing it. Irving sent me a line to come to him and said nice things. So did Miss Terry—when she had time. Just as Irving finished talking to me, she came into the room, with half a dozen members of the company following her. Even the aged manager looked after her umbrella, someone else held her little bag, another man wanted to know if he "could put a girdle round the earth in forty minutes" or less, for her. In short, they all buzzed about Miss Terry like bees round a queen bee, and, as I came away,

I observed a distinct inclination toward her from a walking-stick in the corner of the room.

Bernard Partridge and I celebrated the conclusion of our joint labours by a little dinner to which he invited me in Soho. When the dinner was over he tipped the waiter generously and the waiter did not even say "Thank you."

Partridge called him back. "You know, waiter, I'm not obliged to tip you."

The waiter became confused. "No, sir. Yes, sir. Thanky, sir."

"Yes, that's why I called you back. You forgot to say 'thank you.'"

"Thanky, sir," repeated the waiter.

With the dramatic passing of Irving in this same play of "Becket," those days vanished, and people said to me: "How will Bram Stoker endure to live on now that his friend Irving has gone?"

Bram Stoker did not live so very long after the great chief whom he had served with such supreme devotion. He was ill and hastened his end in his efforts to finish his "Life" of the man with whom his days had been so happily spent. I do not know enough about acting to form any judgment as to Irving's greatness as an actor. Behind his acting there was always the noble, generous man who had conquered adversity and brought the world to his feet. As regards his wonderful personality, though I have met many actors they seem to me far behind their great leader in personal charm, and I never pass Irving's statue at the back of the National Gallery without taking off my hat to it.

CHAPTER XX

THE METHODS OF WOMEN WRITERS

Mrs. Hodgson Burnett, of "Little Lord Fauntleroy" fame, is always more interested in the mentalities of people she writes about than in the plot which surrounds them. In fact, she has never done anything specially marked in plot and has no faculty for inventing complicated events. An individuality presents itself to her and a chain of incidents and a group of other individualities seem to be attracted by its characteristics—as happens in life. To a certain kind of person, certain things will happen. When her central figure creates itself, she knows that it will go on its way to the end of its tragedy or comedy, and in spite of her. The story seems to tell itself. If it did not tell itself, she could not tell it either. There is an expression she often uses to herself in describing the condition of a story—it is perhaps a rather childish phrasing, although it means something definite to her. When a story has "come alive," it is right.

Mrs. Flora A. Steel never deliberately casts about for a plot or a character or sits down to write a story, for the simple reason that she cannot. The machine must be started for her by a cosmic touch. In nine cases out of ten this suggestion comes through her eyes. Nearly every story she has written has had its origin in something she has seen. For instance, "The Potter's Thumb" grew entirely from the

figure of a potter at work, which she saw years ago. In fact, she always works through her eyes. In writing descriptions, which she has often been told she does best, she never thinks of the words, and never consciously considers style, but simply catalogues what she sees and her corrections are always with a view to giving the same vivid reality to her readers. She does not mean by this that in scenery and characterisation she works entirely from real models, but that she actually sees both her figures and her background as clearly as if they were real. She could paint both. So far as she can judge, her talent is purely pictorial.

Madame Sarah Grand's method of work, although she has not produced much of late years, is very simple. As a rule, she can only work in the morning, her hours being from ten until two; and during that time she does not open letters or allow herself to be distracted by any news of the outside world. At one time she used to be very dependent on her mood, but, since she has kept regular hours, finds that if she thinks about what she wants to do beforehand, the mood generally comes when she sits down to write. It is a good deal a matter of discipline. She always has a note-book in her pocket, and very often, if she is interested in what she is doing, she goes on making notes on the subject the whole day long, anywhere she may happen to be, and even gets up again at night and writes whole scenes. Curiously enough, she is afraid to read fiction when writing herself, as she finds that if she comes under the influence of a story-writer her own work suffers. Biographies help her, but novels are disheartening. The best intellectual stimulants she knows are true stories, simply told, of the brave struggles of men and women with high ideals of life to help others and work out the best that is in themselves.

Miss Muriel Dowie's method of going to work is a very simple one, for she likes a room to herself in a country inn, with as little likelihood of interruption as can be secured by any woman. She prefers to sit down after breakfast—a lonely breakfast with no newspapers, but preferably a Scott novel beside her plate ; and if Scott is not to be had, a *Family Herald* will do. Something that occupies her mind and excludes any worrying thoughts of her work is what she requires, and nobody does this so well as Scott ; " Waverley " please, if not, " Rob Roy." Having forgotten a cup of tea, and left an egg and bacon, she likes to whistle and look out of the window while the servants take them away.

Then she sits down, confronted by her pen, small smooth sheets of greenish paper, and a pad of ophthalmic blotting-paper. After a good deal of idling and fixed staring at objects about the room, which she often photographs unconsciously in her memory and afterwards finds she has hated acutely all the time, she starts. About one o'clock, if work has gone well, she has done a chapter. They all come out about the same length, and have but few corrections. When one is too bad to live, and she has to rewrite it, she is in despair and makes a mess, and that chapter never does any good in the world. Should work not be going well, she welcomes a friendly interruption about twelve-thirty. The news that a horse will be round in ten minutes is what she prefers to hear.

That is all her work for the day, and it is almost impossible for her to do it at any other time. All work comes best in the country, with a lonely life and a companion for the afternoons. Someone whom she can bore with accounts of her difficulties and the general hopelessness of the whole thing is, of course, most welcome. She is always depressed

about work, and ruthless with confidences concerning it to the few friends weak enough to bear with her. The main ideas and characters of a story are clear to her before she begins, but details and incidents are settled between the pen and ink-pot. If she thinks them out, she gets to loathe them, and they grow stiff and unmalleable.

Mrs. Burton Harrison works chiefly during four months of the winter, and always in her own study in New York. She is very diligent and absorbed during that time and knows no rest until her ideas are out on paper in her own hand without help from stenographer or secretary. When beginning them, she has but a very general idea of her stories; and, most often, the marionettes whom she uses to carry out her plots take the matter in their own hands and work their will with the helpless author until the final page is reached.

Mrs. W. K. Clifford, the writer of that entrancing book "Aunt Anne," has no method. She simply does it. The people in the story are always very real to her while she is writing about them, her very intimate friends. The people walking and talking in the actual world become merely substantial shadows. When she has finished writing about her folk they disappear from her imagination, and she is merely the outsider and horribly severe critic of them, and of the world which for some few pages they occupied.

Miss Montresor has no method in writing. She thinks of people rather than of events, and her plots (if there are any) follow as the natural outcome of their characters—or at least what seems to her to be the natural outcome.

Miss Violet Hunt has no other method than the rest of the writing world, a method which varies a good deal in everyone, according to the writer's mood, the time of day,

the position of a desk, and domestic circumstances generally. For her own part, she seldom works alone. I met her once and we began to talk about a series of short stories which she had written for a popular magazine. "Why don't you string them together, with a few more complications, and make a book of them?" I suggested. "Everything is there." It had never occurred to her. "I'll go home and do it at once," she said.

As Mrs. Andrew Dean's (Mrs. Sidgwick) story grows, it feels the growing pains. We all know the thrill of the bright idea, and the sorrow as it goes tarnished in the telling. Ideas glow in the idle fancy with a misleading greatness; the effort to express them is anguish; the result looks like ashes. The clouds of glory have fled in the heat of the day's work as real clouds fly before the sun. Even if she has succeeded before, she knows that the story she is wrestling with now is going to be a failure. What is the good of struggling on? Who wants to read about the idiots summoned from the vasty deep? Think of this man's art and that man's scope and hide one's head.

She considers it is demoralising to put one's hand to the plough and look back. And as she begins to get on, certain facts help her in her misery. Strangers review her books and pretend to like them. Strangers buy her books; even her friends say that she might write a story they would read if she could invent a plot and describe nice people, and make everything end well. Anyhow, it is the only work she can do, and she had better do it as well as possible. Therefore, in the clutches of Giant Despair, she struggles to the end.

When she ties up her story in brown paper and posts it, Mrs. Dean wonders why anyone should want to print and pay for such stuff. By the time someone offers her a price

for it she has begun to think that it is not so bad after all, and worth more than that, anyway. But the heart of the miracle is wrought by the printer and the bookbinder. When they send forth their dainty volume, she forgets its connection with that poor creature the manuscript, and presents free copies to her family in the certainty that even though they think small beer of the story they will still find something respectable in its setting. Skilled labour has gone to that.

The late Miss Helen Mathers (Mrs. Reeves) was very vigorous concerning her own methods of writing. When, she declared, first the *cacöethes scribendi* lays hold of us, we rush with ardour at our attempt to leave those footprints on the sands of time that most of us think we shall (and don't), and so long as fame hovers within sight, but just out of reach, we are Spartans in our disregard for fatigue, our rejection of pleasure, of any and everything that interferes with the delectable vision of ourselves in print—a dream before which love-letters wax insipid, new frocks grow old, and all a young girl's choicest vanities stale. But when, after months and years of dogged persistence, one has learned at last how to use one's tools (she began at eight years old, being born with the rudimentary knack of telling stories that requires no other cultivation than industry, and plenty of it) the work one turns out can never give half the pleasure that the first fury of pursuit so ardently promised. After a time, and when success is an old story, we say: "For whom are we wasting all this vital energy and youth? Why are we writing our lives instead of living them? Why these lonely working hours when all the pleasures of life hang ripe on the bough, and only the pen between our fingers prevents our plucking them?" Then to us enters the publisher, who is very kind, even condescending, and distinctly encouraging

as he urges us to keep on at our toil. He whips up our energies when we flag, and dangles the bauble of "Fame" before our eyes, as if it were the living and lasting jewel of Happiness. "Concentrate, concentrate," he says. "Focus your whole mind and soul on the page. Go out of the town, isolate yourself, give of your very best, produce a masterpiece that will beat whoever is the last new craze clean out of the field." But if we have no desire to beat anyone out of the field, if our ambitions are quite otherwise, gradually it begins to dawn on us that we were not born to use up the whole treasures of our lives and souls to enrich new-born publishers, and, *en passant*, give pleasure to people who would not take the trouble to put by all their own enjoyments to give pleasure to us; and one fine day the heart seems to go out of our work and our methods to grow worthless, when we realise that it is we who get the fame, the publisher the money, and the public the pleasure out of our brains; and that in this subdivision of profits somehow it is not we who come off best.

And so we grow careless and slack, we rebel against squandering all the best of our life, our energies, our health, all the beauty and sweetness that should go to enrich our own and our friends' hearts, upon a piece of merchandise for which we are grudgingly paid by the persons who could not exist but for our toil. If, presently, Fortune favours us in a worldly sense, we joyfully elect to write to oblige others no more. For the literary must ever be a small part in a woman's life (it is infinitely more in a man's); and to do her duty by husband and child, house and self, is as much as any woman was ever intended to do thoroughly. In her heart of hearts, she infinitely prefers the sweet monotony, "the daily round, the common task," to enriching strangers, to

making a target of herself to her critics, and, above all, to starving that *joie de vivre* which every healthy human animal ought to know, that joy which is so keen and intense in the temperament that goes to make the musician, the artist, and the story-teller.

As I was chatting one night at a dinner with Annie Swan (Mrs. Burnett Smith) she told me that there was nothing original in her manner of work. She is an extremely methodical person ; but though she has hours set aside for working, they are not as the laws of the Medes and Persians, but subject to interruption and alteration at any time. She never allows her work to become arbitrary to the exclusion of her domestic arrangements ; in which she feels, perhaps, the greatest interest. It is not difficult for her to take up the thread of thought again after being interrupted, and she attributes this to the fact that she was brought up in a large family where a person who required to be quiet was voted a nuisance and promptly sat upon—an excellent training ; and when she hears of the domestic tyranny practised in this form by certain brain workers, she is always sorry that they did not have a like experience. It is a pity when the comfort of one inmate of a home has to be studied to the absolute exclusion of everybody else's comfort.

For many years Annie Swan wrote everything by hand, much of it twice. Now she is obliged to dictate a certain portion of her work ; but while it is an immense saving of time, she would still prefer doing any fine or special work in the old way. Life in the country (she lives at Hertford) is more conducive than life in town to the production of the higher kinds of literary work. The atmosphere and environments are finer and rarer, and nourishing as the dew to fresh and wholesome thought.

Only a few weeks ago I was staying with Dr. and Mrs. Burnett Smith at Hertford in the house which has just been rebuilt for them after having been smashed to flinders by Hun bombs. The magnificent old cedar-tree on the lawn, popularly supposed to have been planted by good Queen Bess (did you ever see a cedar that she had not planted?) had been "blown to smithereens." Fortunately, there was no one in the house when the bombs fell. One of the two Chows was killed, and the other pined away and had to be destroyed. Star Wood, the artist, was blown from one end of the Hertford Club to the other, and, had his hair not already been white, it would assuredly have turned so on that horrible night.

One day when I was lunching with that most interesting personality, the late Mrs. Maxwell (Miss Braddon), the world-famed author of "Lady Audley's Secret" and an enormous number of other novels, she told me that she had resolved in future to write only one novel a year and to discontinue working in the evening. She had an extraordinary range of "general reading" and a vast amount of miscellaneous facts at her finger-tips. Her equally gifted son, W. B. Maxwell, has inherited her industry and talent. His memory is so prodigious that he can learn a long speech by heart and repeat it without a mistake. Of course, everyone knows his work in the literary world, but it is not everyone who knows the delicate way in which he can confer a favour and make it appear that you are doing him one.

CHAPTER XXI

MEETING AUTHORS

EVERY young man who wants to write considers it necessary that he should make the acquaintance of the men who have already written. When he is young and nervous, it is an awesome task to beard these potentates ("male and female created He them") in their dens. He feels himself to be a solitary lion in a den of Daniels, and the risk of being eaten up by the Daniels so much greater than that of his eating the Daniels. The solitary young lion must purr very gently and, with equal gentleness, explain that he has not come to eat but, if need be, to be eaten. At one time the public appetite for details concerning the home lives and careers of authors was insatiable, and the pioneer of the movement who catered for it with unexampled success (I believe that he would have interviewed the devil himself had an enterprising editor procured him a free pass to Hades) was my friend Mr. Raymond Blathwayt, who would "polish off" a crowned head with as much ease and facility as he described the methods of a sweep's invention of a new style in chimney-cleaning.

Raymond Blathwayt had been all over the world and was equally at home with kings and Hottentots. Originally he had been a curate, but found that it palled upon him. On one occasion, there was no celebrity available for an interview, and Blathwayt's proprietors suggested that he should

interview himself. His modesty was unequal to the task, so I offered to do it if he would supply the necessary data. He agreed, and we began something like this :

"One fine summer's morning a curate whose robes ill-concealed his martial step, strode to the reading-desk of such-and-such a church and militantly read the first lesson."

We got on swimmingly, and when I afterwards alluded to the incident, I received a letter from Blathwayt mournfully saying : "Well, you were paid for it." I thankfully acknowledged that I had been paid for it and said that if I had hurt his feelings I was very sorry, for Blathwayt's personality was often more striking than that of the person whom he interviewed. A journalist once parodied Blathwayt's interviews. "'What are your qualifications for interviewing celebrities, Mr. Blatant Makeweight?' 'All of them,' promptly answered Makeweight." And therein Blathwayt spake the truth, for he possessed the marvellous gift of extracting every atom of interesting information from the interviewee, with one solitary exception, who was not feeling well at the time Blathwayt went to see him and, to use an American locution, "shut up like a clam."

I wanted to know authors very much, just to see what they were really like, and, amongst dozens of others, met Edmund Gosse, Jerome K. Jerome, R. D. Blackmore, James McNeill Whistler, Oscar Wilde, Robert Barr, Coulson Kernahan, F. W. Robinson, Lady Constance Howard, "John Oliver Hobbs," Mrs. G. Linnæus Banks, Justin McCarthy, Mrs. Gwynne Bettany, Grant Allen, William Westall, Stuart Cumberland, Mrs. Lynn Linton, Alfred Calmour, "John Strange Winter," W. T. Stead, E. W. Hornung,

Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, Sir James Barrie, and Rudyard Kipling.

Mr. Gosse was very pleasant. In after years, when he had just been made Librarian to the House of Lords and Lord Northcliffe had been elevated to the peerage, he was doing some literary articles for the *Daily Mail.* Lord Northcliffe was asked who had written them, and said: "Our librarian." Lord Northcliffe had to endure many jokes from his friends and enemies alike when he was elevated to the peerage. One ingenious being even went so far as to invent a story that on seeking about for an appropriate title for his new dignity, he remembered that he owned some property at North Cliff, near Ramsgate, whereupon the inhabitants of Ramsgate promptly dubbed him "The new Ramsgate pier." But, as Mrs. Malaprop says: "Be ye pure as snow and chaste as ice, ye shall not escape calomel."

Just before I left Mr. Gosse one afternoon, he paused before Talfourd's portrait of Robert Browning. "Ah," he said, "whenever Browning came here he would linger before this portrait with peculiar satisfaction. It has an inscription in his own handwriting. You see, it was executed in 1859. The latter part of the inscription runs:

'I rejoice that it now belongs to my friend Gosse.'"

R. L. Stevenson, who had a great affection for Mr. Gosse, once playfully alluded to him as "Dear cunning, catlike, crafty old Gosse," and shortly after the appearance of my interview with Mr. Gosse (my first, by the way) I was greatly hurt by a parody of it which appeared in a well-known paper. When I expressed my dissatisfaction to the author of the parody, he was unfeignedly surprised. "I'm so sorry, I

never thought of you ; I wanted to have a playful whack at Gosse."

Before I left Mr. Gosse we talked of so many dead authors that I became nervous, and when the postman knocked at the door with some "proofs" I called a cab and grandiloquently told the Jehu to "Bear me back to the haunts of men and the brilliantly lighted streets." The Jehu said : "Aunts of Men ? Yessir. Is it a public-'ouse ?"

I had known Jerome K. Jerome for some time and, consequently, was not at all shy with him, so called at his flat in Chelsea one afternoon and found him a little bit ruffled, for his "copy" of "The Diary of a Pilgrimage" had been altered to suit the fastidious taste of the more delicately minded readers of the *Daily Graphic*. They had objected to the frequent use of the word "fleas" in connection with foreign travel—as if one could ever indulge in foreign travel without meeting fleas ! Jerome said that he had always considered fleas "such chummy little things." His protestations had due effect and it was arranged with the editor that "flies" were no longer to be substituted for "fleas" in the remainder of the "Diary." A few mornings before, Jerome had received an imperious mandate from the editor of a comparatively obscure journal : "Let me have a 3,000 words story from you as soon as possible, because I am hard up for matter this week. Cheque for three guineas if in your best style." Jerome replied that his price was fifty guineas for the serial rights of such a story. The editor wrote back to him : "Dear sir, there must be some mistake in my letter, as I meant a short story, not a novel. Of course, the price of a novel would be from thirty to fifty guineas."

Jerome told me that in his young days he was in the habit

of writing gushing letters to all sorts of people, "but I like to keep this one:

"Cambridge, U.S.,
"July 22nd, 1879.

"My Dear Young Friend,

"Your letter has given me much pleasure. I am happy to know that any words of mine have cheered and strengthened you. With my best wishes for your happiness and success in life,

"I am, yours very truly,
"Henry W. Longfellow."

R. D. Blackmore was as shy as myself—shyer, if anything—but I procured a letter of introduction to him from a friend and went to see the author of "Lorna Doone." Kipling has described his sensations on shaking hands with Mark Twain for the first time. I wanted to shake hands with Blackmore and was altogether undeterred by the words on the fence round his house at Teddington:

"CAUTION.

"Strong poison on all these fences."

I dodged the "strong poison" and found him at home, a man considerably over medium height, inclined to be stout, with well-shaped humorous mouth, clear, penetrating grey eyes, and a nose neither Greek nor Roman, but betwixt and between. A fringe of white hair surrounded the lower part of his face. He was partially bald, wore light tweed trousers, a comfortable black alpaca coat and a pink shirt open at the throat.

Blackmore did not seem particularly to care about having written "Lorna Doone." For two years it was a "dead" book. Two hundred copies were sold and the rest of the edition shipped off to Australia. At the time of the Marquis of

Lorne's marriage to Princess Louise, people bought it because they thought "Lorna" had something to do with him. Greatly as I liked Blackmore at first sight, I felt convinced that if all the world had been a great garden and men and women were apples and pears, he would have found it more interesting. Here was a man who willingly stood aside from the busy world to live among his plants and trees and flowers. Greatness had come to him unsought, only to be put aside with tranquil indifference.

An interviewer, a young lady, once insisted on interviewing Blackmore. In this difficulty he sought the advice of a neighbour who lived a little in advance of his house. The friend, a clergyman, comforted him, made himself up as much like the novelist as possible, intercepted the young lady, and "filled her up" with a most surprising interview. She went away without learning the truth, and Blackmore looked upon his friend as a really great man for ever after.

A wicked story is told of even this sweet-natured man's use of strong language on his "proofs" when the printers failed to recognise his somewhat exacting requirements. The printers felt hurt at what he wrote about them on the proof sheets, and agreed to play him a trick. The collected edition of Blackmore's novels was coming out, so they made up a "fake" copy of the first volume, with one of his own "proofs" in the middle of the book. The language on the "proof" was lurid. They marked the page and sent on the book to Blackmore. When the first compositor arrived at the printing office the next morning, he found Blackmore wearily sitting on the steps waiting for him. Blackmore's directions to the compositors in future were couched in the courtliest terms.

Whistler ruled everywhere, and, though my ignorance

of Art was colossal, it seemed to me that I ought to know so whimsical a personality. His conversation was wonderfully pungent, brilliant, sparkling, cruel in its biting irony, his wit as the speed of a rapier in the hand of an accomplished duellist, and his conceit so amusing that it was impossible to resent it. He even read me extracts from his own works. Here is one of the extracts :

"Nature for once has sung in tune, sings her exquisite song to the artist alone, her son and her master—her son in that he loves her, her master in that he knows her. To him her secrets are unfolded, to him her lessons have become gradually clear. He looks at her flower, not with the enlarging lens, that he may gather facts for the botanist, but with the light of one who sees, in her choice selection of brilliant tones and delicate tints, suggestions of future harmonies."

At a well-known club a vote was taken as to the wittiest reflection in "The Gentle Art of Making Enemies." Frith, the artist, had written : "It was just a toss-up whether I became an artist or an auctioneer." Whistler's "Reflection" was, "He must have tossed up." He was greatly pleased with what I afterwards told a friend about his appearance (the "white lock" in particular) and conversational powers. "There's only one thing," he drawled with gentle earnestness when we again met. "You omitted to tell him that I always wear silk bootlaces. Silk!"

When I called on Oscar Wilde, that strange, sad, perverted genius made several appointments and never kept one of them. The only time I ever saw him was at that interminable performance of "The Cenci" at the Grand Theatre, Islington, May 7, 1866, which was to prove to the world that Shelley would have been a greater dramatist than Shakespeare if he had "given his mind to it." Oscar Wilde seemed to be giving his mind to it, but, after two or three hours' tension,

he apparently tired of Shelley as a dramatist, and stood leaning against a pillar, his pale, heavy features and long dark hair marking him out from the hot and excited crowd around him. Lowell and Browning sat side by side ; in short, everyone was there. Wilde's dress was the customary frock-coat, or, as they call it in America, a " King Albert," probably because Albert the Good was good enough to invent that detestable garment. And he was very stout. The only time he showed the slightest animation was when Hermann Vezin (the Count) thundered out with the voice of an impious demigod :

> " Heaven rain upon her head
> The blistering drops of the Maremma's dew
> Till she be speckled like a toad ; parch up
> Those love enkindled lips, warp those fine limbs
> To loathèd lameness. All-beholding sun
> Strike in thine envy those life-darting eyes
> With thine own blinding beams."

" Seems unkind for a father to say such things about his own daughter," quoth a stranger beside me.

Wilde and Whistler had been great friends. Then they quarrelled and thrust at one another, Whistler winding up with the following on seeing Wilde in Polish cap and green overcoat befrogged and befurred :

" Oscar ! How dare you ! What means this disguise ? Restore those things to Nathan's, and never again let me find you masquerading the streets of my Chelsea in the combined costumes of Kossuth and Mr. Mantalini."

At that time Robert Barr was writing articles for the London edition of the *Detroit Free Press* under the pseudonym of " Luke Sharp." When I went into his office one day, he stood by a table with a box on top and talked into a tube with a funnel :

"If an oyster does not meet a man who is fond of oysters, it will live to be fifteen years old. 'The Christian Million' wants a new temple erected in London that will hold a hundred thousand people. Why not have one big enough to hold the Christian Million? You are not allowed to whistle in the streets of Buenos Ayres, but those English stockholders who place their money in that city are allowed to whistle in London if they like."

He left the box, produced his inevitable cigarettes and began to chat about Rudyard Kipling, for whom he had a great liking. He had just been reading the MS. of one of Kipling's stories and was full of admiration at the care with which it was written. "Why, Kipling will write a thing five times over. Bailey Aldrich once compressed a poem of fourteen stanzas into two. Kipling does very nearly the same. This story has been written over five times. Some parts, as you see, are written in black ink and some in red. These red portions will be re-arranged by the author. Then the whole thing will be type-written. Kipling will again go over the type-written copy, improving, amending, adding, and cutting out. We give him a first proof, which he will fall upon and mutilate in a way that will make the printer tired when the proof gets back to him. How many proofs he will consume before the story is published nobody knows, but I am afraid the whole printing establishment will take to drink before he gets through with it.

"Care like that, however, is the price of success; all the fame Kipling has won he deserves. There is no rocket-and-a-stick business about him. The celebrity into which he has sprung appears to be sudden, but it isn't. He sentenced himself to seven years' hard labour to attain it. Of course, hard work alone would not win such a success, but hard work

and genius make a strong team when rightly driven, and Kipling knows how to drive."

There is a story told of Barr that he was once travelling in France with his wife in a non-smoking carriage when two brawny Huns, each smoking a huge pipe, got into the carriage. Explaining that it was not a smoking-carriage and that Mrs. Barr objected to smoking, Barr promptly bundled them out again. At the first stopping-place, when the Huns were strolling up and down the platform, they saw Barr smoking a huge cigar in the same carriage. "You to us tell," one of them spluttered, "this a smoking carriage not is, and you yourself smokes when the lady the smoke not wishes." "Ah, but you see," replied Barr, "she's my wife and can't help herself."

Coulson Kernahan had just brought out "A Dead Man's Diary," and I dropped into his study one day for a chat about it. Round the walls were a sombre set of pictures of martyrs, evidently some of the earliest specimens of mezzotints. I was not surprised to learn that Jerome called them "a gloomy crew." A decidedly enlivening influence was a statue of the Venus de Milo. Near it stood Jerome's portrait with an inscription: "From your old chum."

Kernahan was a good-looking, well-built man who wore a necktie fastened in a flowing bow with loose ends. Since the "Diary" came out, he had received literary offers on all sides and was able to choose his own work. I asked him to read me his favourite passage in that anything but cheerful though powerful work. It gives a very fair idea of his style:

"Yes, I am in love, although as yet I cannot tell what the name of my love is or will be. But in every inspired poem or perfect picture, in the soaring and sobbing of music, in sunrise and sunset, or in the sighing of the wind upon my cheek, there is something which speaks to me of her, and which beckons my spirit forth in search of her, as if by the leading of an unseen hand. And

sometimes, but only in my dreaming, musing moments, my thoughts, as they wander forth into the blue expanse around me, take colour and shape, and I see her standing by a tiny cot in a cosy room where the warm firelight flickers on walls gay with pictures."

Kernahan followed up this success with "God and the Ant." He sent a copy of it to that erratic genius, Richard le Gallienne, who returned the compliment by presenting Kernahan with his own poems containing the "blasphemious" inscription "From the Ant to God." An impulsive, warm-hearted Irishman, Kernahan is always trying to help his friends and succour the needy. We are closely knit together by recollections of our early days when every goose was a swan and every girl a goddess in disguise.

One of fortune's favourites is Sir Hall Caine. He has not only succeeded as a novelist but as a dramatist also, and his second son, Derwent, has taken to the stage. For many years I have watched Sir Hall Caine's career, and agree with him, as he once said to me, that "sometimes the penalties of success are greater than those of failure," for he has one of those acutely nervous organisations which are remorselessly insistent in their demands. Hence, he never gives anything to the world without suffering proportionately, sometimes out of all proportion. He is not at his best in a crowd, but get him in a corner and interest him in any particular subject and he magnetises you with his wealth of imagery, his copious illustrations, his fluency and enthusiasm. As a host he is perfection. I once stayed with a party of friends at Greba Castle and he anxiously watched over us the whole time in order to see that we did not have a dull or unhappy moment. We all met in London, and a lame poet—at least, he thought he was a poet—was one of the party.

The lame poet provided great amusement by making his

man set him out an appetising little lunch in a corner of the carriage. By the time we were half-way to Liverpool we

> "Began to feel, as well we might,
> The keen demands of appetite,"

the ladies especially; but the lame poet, in spite of their appealing glances, devoured his savoury sandwiches to the last crumb, and washed them down with a half-bottle of wine. Presently Sir Hall Caine came along and whispered gleefully in our ears: "Never mind. We are going to have a delightful champagne lunch on board the steamer which takes us to the Isle of Man, and he won't be able to eat any."

When we sat down to lunch the lame poet struggled to the table, tried to eat and found that he could not. "Why didn't you tell me we were going to have lunch on board?" he grumbled to his host. "Then I could have saved my sandwiches."

At first we all felt very sorry for the lame poet and tried to minister to him, but his selfishness was so pronounced that we had to give it up. One evening, at dinner, his unfortunate valet (he was supposed to hold his situation on the condition of securing the best of everything for his master) got into difficulties. I was startled by a peal of silvery laughter from Lady Hall Caine. "There's Mr. ——'s man trying to take away the green peas from my maid," she said. "He's evidently afraid that there won't be enough to go round and wants to serve his master first."

Sir Hall Caine is always very helpful to young authors. "Write me out the plot of your novel and I'll run through it and make any suggestions I can," he once said to me. I did not do it because it seemed to me an imposition to

expect him to waste his time on the crude efforts of a youngster.

And he can be very generous in his tribute to a brother-author. He was asked to take the chair at a dinner to Zangwill and was unable to be present:

"I regret extremely that I do not feel well enough to join you in doing honour to our friend Zangwill.

"There are three main grounds on which I think our Club is doing itself an honour in honouring our guest. First, on the ground that as a true man of letters he has never once, during the twenty years in which we have known him, failed in that loyalty which every author owes to his profession. Next, on the ground that he has always been true to his race, making sacrifices of personal advantage to serve the interest of the poor and oppressed among his people. Finally, on the ground that his ideas have always been of the highest, and that the great thought of his new play should, in the midst of wars and the rumours of wars, do the world as well as the stage much good. Add to all this our affection for him as a man and we have known enough to know that the Club is honoured in honouring him."

At one time Sir Hall Caine was himself the guest of the New Vagabonds and carefully wrote out his speech beforehand in honour of the occasion. Knowing the inadequacy with which literary speeches are reported, he sent slips of this speech to the papers the day before the dinner. One Press man made merry at this with a complete disregard for good taste and in defiance of all Press etiquette. A small section of the audience rather annoyed the orator by their inattention to what was really, if somewhat lengthy, a very careful pronouncement on certain vexed questions. They tinkled their spoons in their coffee-cups and manifestly

disturbed the speaker by this exhibition of bad manners. He wrote to me a few days afterwards when I apologised to him for their thoughtlessness :

" Of course the man has done a very disloyal and unprofessional thing, in referring to the proofs sent in advance, but one can reconcile one's self to this in the light of the appalling exhibition he makes of his ignorance. Apparently, he does not know that my reference to the 'good old Partridges' of journalism was an allusion to Partridge the schoolmaster in 'Tom Jones,' who goes to the theatre for the first time when he is a middle-aged man and sees everything in a new and amusing light. Hence, a great part of the article amounts to a confession on the part of the writer that he has not read 'Tom Jones.' I am told that the critic is a novelist. It is, therefore, amusing to reflect that one who practices the art of English fiction is not even on nodding terms with one of the earliest masterpieces of his craft.

" The stress of life seems always to be actively at work pulling old friends apart, but I trust we may meet again before very long."

Sir Hall Caine is curiously like Shakespeare in appearance. One day I was passing the Shakespeare statue in Leicester Square with a friend of the novelist's and was amused to see S—— take off his hat and bow profoundly to it. " Strange ! " he said. " It is very strange how absent-minded our friend Caine is to-day. He doesn't seem to know me ! "

CHAPTER XXII

A DISTRESSED AMATEUR

On looking over some old letters a few days ago, I found one signed "A Distressed Amateur." This Distressed Amateur wanted to know "How can I induce an editor to read my MSS? How shall I set about it?

> "For what availeth force or guile
> With him, or who deceive his mind, whose eye
> Views all things at one view—
> That of rejection.

"I have tried all manner of ways, and my MSS., like the seasons, return to me. If, in the course of your ubiquitous career, you can afford me any information on the point, believe me when I say that I shall be very grateful. My stuff (I am not speaking egotistically) is better than lots of things I see in the magazines. Couldn't you ask one of your editor friends to give me the benefit of his views on the subject? I know I am causing you a lot of trouble, but he can't eat you. When I ask to see an editor, his satellites assume an appearance of injured innocence and want to know if I have an appointment. Of course I haven't an appointment, and they look as if there were 'no sitch a person' as an editor. He is as invisible as the Grand Lama. But there must be editors or there wouldn't be magazines. I am 'eating my heart out.' The desire to see myself in

print is so strong that surely it must have some justification. Of course, I can go to a publisher and pay to have things brought out, but that is not what I want. Just see if you can do something and come and talk it over with me at afternoon tea. I enclose my card and am,

"Yours very apologetically,

"A Distressed Amateur."

Of course, the "afternoon tea" settled the matter, apart from the statement that the writer was "eating her heart out." My correspondent was a woman, and I have had so many ups and downs—mostly downs—when seeking editors that I have always tried to help beginners. "A fellow-feeling makes us wondrous kind." It is a very fine thing to see one's name in print—even in a directory; but it has its inconveniences. However,

> "A man's a fool who strives by force or skill
> To stem the torrent of a woman's will;
> For if she will, she will, you may depend on't,
> And if she won't, she won't, and there's an end on't."

But, as I do not take tea with ladies whom I have not the honour of knowing, I decided to look up an editor or two and find out how—from the editor's point of view—my correspondent could get a start.

As a rule, an editor's time is very valuable. He has probably half a dozen irons in the fire which must be looked after. How can he possibly attend to them if he has to see all the people who call on him and answer all the letters which he receives on a point like that raised above? He cannot possibly do it.

Sir Clement Kinloch-Cooke gave me a quarter of an hour of

his valuable time when I wrote to him about my correspondent. I also told him that an authoritative statement as to the best method of sending in MSS. might possibly lighten his own editorial labours.

"You see," he said, "in the first place I always select my own articles. If an author wants to send in anything to an editor, he should first write a line to the editor stating his subject. If the author is known in connection with his subject, the editor thinks the matter over, and, if he wants an article on this particular subject, writes to the author to tell him so. If he does not want the subject, he simply puts the letter in his waste-paper basket.

"The subject is the first thing. There's no use in any author of any kind whatever writing piles and piles of stuff, however good it may be, unless he has a subject of public interest, from cats to—well, anything. It doesn't matter one whit so long as it is a subject for which there is a large public. In selecting a magazine to which he wants to send his MSS. an author should read the magazine and make himself acquainted to a certain extent with its editor's line. Good writing goes a long way with an editor, especially from unknown authors. With known people it does not matter so much, but a badly-written unknown MS. is never read and never has a chance. It should always be type-written, although there is danger in that. Five copies of one particular MS. may be sent round to five editors at the same time. I remember a MS. coming before me. The author had also sent it to three or four other editors. I accepted his story on its merits. I knew nothing about it except that it was good, sent it to the printers, and, just as it was going to be published, discovered that the same story had been brought out that week or the week before. No intimation whatever had been

given to me about it, and the only excuse which the author made was that I should have decided earlier. That was the argument employed. My contention was that I had written to the author to say that I was considering the paper, as I had further written suggesting that he should make one or two alterations. Whenever a type-written article is sent in, it should be expressly stated by an unknown author that the MS. has not been submitted to any other editor for a certain fixed space of time. Then there can be no possibility of mistakes arising.

"It must not be assumed that because an editor fails to answer letters at once he does not wish to be polite. It is simply that he has not the time to do so. As a rule, the editors of magazines have other work to do, and they cannot spend the whole of their time in writing polite letters to people saying that they cannot take their MSS. When a thing is refused in a stereotyped form, it must not be supposed that it is no good. It is possible that it may be very good indeed and yet not suit the editor or the magazine. That is the more reason why people should send in the names of their subjects and state the number of words their articles or stories will be."

My "Distressed Amateur" repeated her invitation to tea, and, at the same time, enclosed a letter of introduction from a mutual friend. She was radiant, and apologised for having given me so much trouble. "Of course," she said, "amateurs, that is, ordinary amateurs, do have difficulties with stupid editors, but only this morning I received a letter from the dear, darling, delightful editor of the *English Illustrated Magazine*, accepting a story of mine. Do you take sugar in yours?"

I was talking to the late Weedon Grossmith one day about

his career and expressed an opinion that a man's failures were more interesting than his successes. He stared at me in astonishment. "I never had any failures. My father had, but I never did."

One loved his brother. There had been a dinner at the Authors' Club and George Grossmith was the guest of the evening, delighting everyone with his high spirits and amusing anecdotes. As I was leaving, he came up to me. "I say, Burgin, I want you to come home with me for a little while."

I was about to decline but something in his manner checked me, and I got into a cab with him. He sat huddled up in a corner without saying a word, and when we reached his house silently led the way into a particular room and turned on the light. Mrs. Grossmith, to whom he was devotedly attached, had died some time ago. Her work-basket stood on a little table in one corner and various feminine trifles were scattered about. "That's why," he said, noticing my glance—"that's why I asked you to come home with me for a little while. May you never know what it is to come back to an empty house!"

Only the other day I was shown a letter from another devoted husband—a letter written in 1804 by a merchant living at St. Albans—to his wife, who was on a visit to town. It is rather touching, albeit a trifle sarcastic in its expressions of uxorial affection:

"My Dear Love,—If attention to your request is to be taken as any proof of my affection for you, I presume you will not say that I am wanting in this test of it. Believe me when I say that I never addressed myself to write you with greater pleasure than during your present absence. I am so much at a loss without you—so lonesome by myself—that anything concerning you, whether it be in my thoughts, or by the employment of my pen, I do most readily engage in it. I think I never felt your loss so much as last night—when I retired to my closet you and the dear children were so much on my mind. I thought, where is that dear face that used to welcome me with a smile—

where is that pretty tongue that used to delight me—where is that little ewe lamb that used to lie in my bosom? When I go downstairs I shall have no face to see, no tongue to hear, no arms to embrace me. All will be a naked void. . . . Your letter, my dear life, now confirms what I told you, viz., that you would stay to the last day. Don't think that my reminding you of this is because I wish you to contract the time, and thus deprive you of your present pleasure. No, my love. I am content to sacrifice my own pleasure (and the Lord knows that your company is the greatest earthly pleasure I have) to yours and your dear friends. If you be but comfortable and happy let me be disregarded. Yet suffer me to say that I shall think the days long until I see you, and that I long for your company more and more every day.

"I must reprove you a little for the brevity of your letters. Scarcely do they contain one good page. I know well enough your aversion to writing; the day book to wit. But yet, my dearest creature, you should have recollected that what I had now to subsist upon, to preserve my life of affection, was not you but yours. Your correspondence was all my comfort. The reason you assign for this brevity is unquestioningly invincible. The dinner is in view one day at your sister's, the next it is at your grandmother's. Was it by design that you began your epistles just before the beef and pudding smoked upon the table—that you might draw to a close with a good argument? I will not suspect you of this, but yet remember that you furnished me with the idea, for that if you had said nothing about dinner I should have imputed the shortness of your letter to your dislike to the employment of the pen. However, I am glad that the dinner table is thus regarded by you, and only wish it may be so when you return home. With love to brother and sister, duty to grandmother and respects as before, I remain, my most valuable comfort, my dear earthly all,

"Yours inviolably, unchangeably, invariably, and tenderly,

"JOSEPH HARRIS."

"St. Albans, 28th August, 1804.

"P.S.—*My dinner is not yet ready!*"

But to return to our amateurs.

How does an amateur ever become a professional writer? Frankly, I do not know. For the dozen who survive, hundreds go under, particularly young barristers, without any influence to help them. Someone has said that the only way for a young barrister without influence is to marry a wealthy solicitor's daughter. Then the solicitor gives him briefs and he gets a start. But I have known at least a dozen young barristers, brilliant youths full of promise, who rented

chambers in the Temple, put their names on their doors and sat down to wait for briefs which never came, so they took to journalism and short-story writing. It occurred to them that they ought to know the "old-stagers" of Fleet Street. They frequented the public-houses in which Fleet Street abounds, and day by day loafed and drank themselves into failures, became utterly hopeless. Their ideals and hopes faded, disappeared. I have walked from Charing Cross to Fleet Street and met two or three of them on the way. By the time I reached Anderton's Hotel all my small change had disappeared and my lunch perforce had to be frugal. It was useless trying to help them. You knew that it was useless. But what could you do? As a last resort, I took to dodging down Fetter Lane in order to avoid them, and felt ashamed of myself for doing so.

Some people, however, like the lover in "The Young Visiters," think that a man who wishes to write can "take the bull by both horns" and succeed at once. But no one can possibly succeed in any business without learning the rudiments of it. In the writing world, if a beginner be poor he learns the rudiments only by suffering, disappointment, heart-breaking failures. As Friar Grundy once put it at the Whitefriars, he "sits in his lonely garret, shivering beneath the stars, eating the dog biscuit of affliction and drinking the sloppy rain-water which oozes through the roof." Most of the men who have "arrived" will tell you of the bitterness of the journey they had to take, although at the same time they admit that without it they would never have succeeded. It formed them, taught them human nature, they learned sympathy. The greatest writers are generally the most sympathetic, and when they see a failure say to themselves: "There, but for the grace of God, go I."

I am told that

> "When in spring a young man's fancy
> Lightly turns to Jane or Nancy,"

and Jane or Nancy reciprocates, that is the supreme moment. To a youth struggling to write, the supreme moment is when he sees for the first time his own name in all the cold austerity of print. There is a rapture "vulgar minds can never know" in strolling up to the same bookstall half a dozen times the same day and casually purchasing copies of the paper which contains his great effort.

There was a certain halfpenny paper which had a habit of making its contributors call every Saturday for their money, and a young friend of mine, who unreasonably expected to receive at least five pounds for his maiden article, was grievously disappointed when the cashier proffered him three and ninepence. "If I give you threepence," he said to the cashier, "will you alter it to four shillings? Three and nine looks so paltry. You see, my people at home, when I write to tell them about it, won't think much of three and nine; four shillings would look so much nobler." The cashier obligingly made it four shillings and refused the compensatory threepence.

And here, with sorrow I confess it, I have to record a very shameful act on my part. My only excuse for it is that I was young and did not realise what I was doing. At the "Old Vagabonds" I had "chummed up" with Captain Patmore, a son of Coventry Patmore. Patmore, who had quarrelled with his father, was hard up and once reduced my sister to tears by producing an old milk-book in which he kept his accounts, and showing her how successfully he lived on a penny a day. I wanted to save money, so Patmore

induced me to take a couple of rooms at a place hard by the Tower, called Royal Mint Square, where he also dwelt. He helped me to buy my furniture at secondhand shops and varnished the floors for a pecuniary consideration which cost more than the varnish. As a final effort of good will (it was a Saturday night when I first took possession) he said: "Now, I'll take you round to my tradespeople, a very civil, obliging lot, and introduce you to them. You'll find that will help you a good deal."

So we went to the butcher's. The butcher was busy, very busy. Patmore introduced me with a flourish. "This is my friend, Smithers. I have made him promise to give you his custom and expect you to treat him as if he were myself."

Mr. Smithers regarded us with a certain severity. "Oh, that you, Capting? Come to settle your little account?"

"No, I haven't."

"Well, then, Capting, all I can say is, if I don't get no fatter on his custom than I do on yours, I shall end up as a living skelington. Brisket, I think you said, mum?"

I beat a hasty retreat from the long-suffering Smithers, and Patmore apologised. "Vulgar beast! I'm sorry I'd forgotten all about his d—d account. Suppose we try the others?" My courage failed me and we let the others alone.

The next day, fearing that I should be lonely, Patmore invited me to dine with him. "Never mind the expense," he said. "You bring a steak big enough for two and I'll provide the potatoes."

But about my shameful deed, a deed in the committal of which I was aided and abetted and "put up to" by Captain Patmore.

I had been reading a review of a volume of essays by

Coventry Patmore and mournfully expressed my regret at my inability to buy the book. "Oh, I'll show you how to get it," suggested Patmore, who hated his father. "The old bird's always susceptible to flattery, and I know just how to put salt on his tail. Sit down and I'll dictate you a letter."

He dictated the letter with a cold-blooded and malevolent precision. In it, I was a young man afflicted by the Divine Fire, a Divine Fire which had been kindled and stimulated by the closest study of "The Angel in the House," and Coventry Patmore's other works. And now I wanted to read his essays but was too poor to buy them. Of course I merely mentioned this because I thought that all great authors liked to know the influence they exercised on the rising generation.

"Now sign it with your name and put in brackets, 'An earnest young Seeker after Truth,'" prompted the evil genius at my elbow, chuckling with fiendish glee. He took the letter and posted it at once so that I should not change my mind.

To this day, I have not recovered from the scorching shame which possessed me when Coventry Patmore sent me the book and expressed his pleasure that he had so greatly influenced me. And as I read the letter, his son stood beside me grinning with devilish satisfaction. "I knew that would fetch the old bird," he repeated. "I knew it would fetch him."

I sneaked out to the nearest bookseller's, bought another copy of the book and sent it anonymously to Coventry Patmore as the only feeble reparation I could make, for I felt that it would hurt him cruelly were he to realise that his own son had originated our despicable plot.

CHAPTER XXIII

MORE AUTHORS

It is a far cry from "distressed amateurs" to sonnet-making, but a friend introduced me to Samuel Waddington, who was "possessed" by sonnets. Of course a would-be novelist ought to know everything and a little over, so I got hold of Mr. Waddington one day and asked him to "turn himself loose" on the sonnet. He turned himself loose, with the result that I discovered that a sonnet was a complete representation of one single thought, feeling, or incident. I was already aware that it had fourteen lines to it, but what struck me most was when Mr. Waddington said the writing of a sonnet took from three minutes to three years. Hartley Coleridge generally devoted some forty seconds to each line, and Keats wrote

"Glory and loveliness have passed away,"

whilst he was engaged with a lively circle of friends and the printer's devil waited. I wanted, however, wanted badly, to see fourteen lines which had taken three years to write, so the celebrated author of "A Century of Sonnets" reluctantly produced

"THE GARDEN OF NEREUS

"Mid deep sea pastures that the dolphins love,
'Neath rocky bowers hidden far away,
With pearl-strewn grotto and dim coral grove,
And many an amber path where mermaids stray,

Beyond the tumult of our garrulous day,
Blooming unseen in ocean's vast alcove,
Behold these gardens that our wonder move
With sea-flowers brilliant and with pennons gay.
Here Love first blossomed, here was Life first seen,[1]
In pre-historic eras long ago,
Ere yet from ocean rose the Cyprian queen,
Or Eve in Eden fain would taste and know;
And here, when earth-born hearts shall cease to beat,
Love shall, with Life, still find a last retreat."

"And many an amber path where mermaids stray" appealed to me, but I came to the conclusion that no editor would commission me to write a sonnet if it took me three years to do it. Wordsworth once entreated people to

"Scorn not the sonnet; critic, you have frown'd
Mindless of its just honour."

Still, it seemed to me "a far, far better thing," if I did not want to starve, to write five hundred words in half an hour for an up-to-date journal and receive three guineas for them, than to risk a problematical seven and six for three years' hard labour.

After the rarefied atmosphere of the sonnet, it was a great relief to descend to the level paths of prose, and so I told my friend the late Grant Allen, who could do everything with the absent-minded air of a man who did not know that he was doing anything at all. He was a great invalid and had to go abroad every winter. When he arrived at a fresh town, he invariably sent a telegram to the headmaster of the

[1] According to Mr. H. G. Wells, Life was first seen in the shape of "a lemur-like creature that clambered about the trees and ran, and probably ran well, on its hind legs upon the ground. It was small-brained by our present standards, but it had clever hands with which it handled fruits and beat nuts upon the rocks and perhaps caught up sticks and stones to smite its fellows. It was our ancestor."

school which contained his little son, so that he could at once know if anything went wrong with the boy. I shall never forget visiting him at Dorking and going with him for his first walk after returning from abroad. Although I knew a little about plants, five minutes with Grant Allen convinced me that I knew very little indeed. He went poking about with his stick. "There should be the first leaves of so and so just here under this stone," and when, metaphorically speaking, he said, "Let there be leaves," there were leaves. Also, there were Roman encampments. When we came to a Roman encampment, he made it as interesting as if it were a Romany Rye one. "There should be a cottage at the end of each field," he said mournfully. "This land ought to support a family. A young fellow like you ought to support a family on the produce of such a field as this," and I was afraid he would next say, "Let there be a family for this young man to support." He put it differently. "By the way, have you a family?" I told him that my family consisted of a disreputable-looking old black cat and, for the sake of the cat, he pardoned my not having a family.

When I first knew him he was a tall, thin, intellectual-looking man, who generally wore grey tweeds. I have seen him in evening dress, but preferred the grey tweeds. He had silvery hair, high forehead, penetrating blue eyes and a rather aquiline nose. His beard and moustache faded into grey.

Grant Allen once wrote an article in which he stated his objections to novel-writing, but the British public, though it loved his natural history and scientific articles, insisted on his writing novels. He told me that he had never made a hit and I refused to believe him.

"Well," he explained, "not a great hit. I have not made

a real success in anything yet. My work has gone on steadily gaining in esteem, but never suddenly. I should say that Stevenson, for instance, made a hit with 'Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde.' I can never make a success in that sense. No book of mine sells much more than a preceding one. I write whenever I feel inclined. Very often I am unfit for it, and when I do work I sit down and write as long as I can. Herbert Spencer used to say, before he came to stop in my house, he thought I was one of the hardest-worked men in England. When he spent a summer with us he found out that I was a gentleman at leisure."

We were talking about the ages of various men we knew, and the deceptions of grey hair. It reminded him of the story of the grey-haired man and the bald-headed man who had a quarrel. "My hair has stuck to its post," proudly said the grey-haired man. "Mine preferred death to dishonour," rejoined the bald-headed one.

"I can't understand," he once said to me, "how you can concentrate yourself on your work at Pearson's with so many beautiful girls around you. I should want to make heroines of them all."

To authors, it is always an interesting thing to compare the methods of others. William Westall, the author of "In Queer Street," was walking one morning with a friend on the beach at Blackpool. It was a very beautiful morning with a clear sky and a calm sea. He saw a Salvation Army band and it struck him that the *tout ensemble*—the sea and sky—the picturesque groups about—two or three rough-looking men giving an account of their conversion—would make a good beginning for a story. So he went about thinking of it, sometimes at night, sometimes in the morning, at odd moments. Then he set to work and wrote "A Fair Crusader,"

and called the Salvationist heroine by that name. In order to make the book as interesting as possible, he sought out the Salvationists themselves and went to Clapham—to "The Burglars' Home," as some people called it—and interviewed several burglars. The story required an original poison which had not been used before. A doctor recommended him cocaine and he obtained all the information he could as to its specific action. It struck him one day that "In Queer Street" would make a good title for a story. Shortly after, he met a friend who gave him an initial idea for it. After that he had no difficulty; the story grew out of the idea.

Sometimes it is difficult to write a story round a title; sometimes it is easy. I once called on a certain editor who coyly produced a drawing by the late Alice Havers in which a young man, in bed, with a broken arm, gazed with every mark of passionate adoration at a very handsome girl. He wanted me to write a story "round it," "but, for the purposes of this story, you must remember that we circulate very largely among clergymen's families. The young lady looking at the young gentleman in the bed must be taken to be his sister. Several authors, if I may use the expression, have 'shied' at the young lady being considered the young gentleman's sister. Are you inclined to—eh—shy also?"

I had not a "shy" left in me, but took the picture home, made the horse of the young gentleman shy, throw him down a gravel-pit and break his arm. His sister hauled him out of the gravel-pit, put him to bed—or, as the story was to be circulated in clergymen's families, he put himself to bed, broken arm and all—and gazed adoringly at her imaginary brother as no sister in this or any other world would by any possibility gaze at her own brother. The editor was quite

pleased and said that the clergymen's families would be pleased also.

And now for another story on somewhat similar lines, although an old friend, a former editor of the *Graphic*, says "si non é vero." But, for all that, it is true. In my callow days he had accepted a little poem of mine, and, accordingly,

"Week in, week out, from morn till night,"

I pestered him with bales of alleged poems which he very promptly and wisely rejected, although at the time of their rejection the impression he made upon me was that what he knew about really great poems was not worth knowing. But I graciously overlooked this lack of knowledge on his part and went one day to ask him whether I might write a story for the *Graphic*.

He looked at me a little wearily, opened a drawer, and produced a large double-page engraving of a small girl walking between two lions, with one hand on the head of each. There was a Boer camp in the distance. "Can you write a story round this?" he asked with the air of a man repeating a question of which he was more than a little tired. "Our artist sent it home from Africa without any explanation as to what it means, and, shortly afterwards, died out there. No one has ever been able to find out what it does mean. Can you find out and write a story round it?"

He was manifestly surprised and rather pained when I said I thought I could. Reluctantly, very reluctantly, he handed me the precious drawing, and I took it away and wrote a story in which a little Boer girl told her parents that in the night she heard two lions roaring round the camp and went out to make friends with them. The lions left off roaring and were quite chummy, so she put a hand on

the head of each and walked about the camp with them. The old people smiled incredulously, but, to please the child, went to look at the spot where she said that she had walked with the lions. *They found the lions' footprints in the sand and the child's between them.* The editor seemed on the verge of a collapse when I proudly brought the story to him, and said that he supposed he'd *have* to print it.

At the time, I thought this rather ungracious, even for that king of men, an editor. Had I not saved him a good deal of money for the price of the drawing, rescued him from the secret sorrow which was cutting short his honoured days? And, strange to say, he seemed more annoyed than grateful. Why?

The reason was, as he reluctantly admitted to me in after years, that he kept that particular drawing to choke off people who wanted work. Often he found his hand straying to the drawer when authors made requests similar to mine, and remembered in silent grief, although he inwardly cursed me, that he would have to fall back upon some cheap, lame, paltry, stereotyped excuse which would convince nobody.

CHAPTER XXIV

MUSIC AND MORALS, ETC.

When talking one afternoon with the late Rev. H. R. Haweis ("Music and Morals" Haweis) he told me that he had a very strong desire to write when he was at college and had written a vast amount of inconceivably inflated and ridiculous articles which he looked back upon with amazement to think that any editor could print such stuff. What he really suffered from was an absolute want of anything to say. He knew nothing and had nothing to say, but set to work to study and observe and became a voracious though very slow reader. The literature of the day was seldom a man's own thoughts, but, more or less, a collation skilfully concealed, or not concealed at all, of other people's thoughts; and the immense multiplication of books and newspapers was disinclining people to think for themselves. So he gave himself systematically to meditation and observation and took a hint from Emerson where he warns us against reading for the sake of reading, and urges us to read creatively, that is, to read not for the sake of poaching on other people's thoughts, but in order to stimulate our own thinking powers, by the real assimilation instead of the accumulation of others' thoughts.

His "Music and Morals" contained a kind of thing which had not been said about music before—an attempt to do for music what Ruskin did for architecture. His way of treating

music was suggested to him not by anything which others had written but by his own thoughts brought to bear upon the subject after considerable acquaintance with the art of music and the literature of music.

A *Vanity Fair* cartoon of Mr. Haweis was pinned against the bookcase. He was very lame and had to help himself about with a stick. "Yes," he said, noticing that my eyes rested on the cartoon, "I keep that up there to make me humble."

There was an amusing jingle written about him:

> "Little baby Haweis, playing with your corals,
> Mamma will teach you music, but who will teach you morals?"

Good-natured and always helpful, Silas Hocking was once asked by the editor of *Vanity Fair* if he would allow himself to be cartooned, and agreed that he would. When he saw the cartoon, he did not like it and wrote an indignant letter to the editor, which was crossed by one from that gentleman saying that he felt so sure Silas Hocking would appreciate the cartoon that he was prepared to sell him the original for ten pounds.

About this time, Stuart Cumberland, the mind reader (he amused himself in his spare moments by reading the minds of authors) had a paper called the *Mirror*, not because it cast reflections on anybody, but because it reflected his own personality. There was something uncanny about Mr. Cumberland's personality, although he had the knack of greatly comforting unsuccessful authors. I dropped in one day to find whether I had a future, but became so occupied in trying to analyse him that I forgot about myself. He kept me waiting for a few minutes and I picked up a paper in which Rudyard Kipling freed his soul on the subject of

American girls. My own experience of them was akin to Spielmann's, who said that they always began the conversation with a repartee :

" They are clever, they can talk—yea, it is said that they think. Certainly they have an appearance of so doing, which is delightfully deceptive. . . . They have societies and clubs, and unlimited tea-fights, where all the guests are girls. They are self-possessed, without parting with any tenderness that is their sex-right ; they understand they can take care of themselves, they are superbly independent. When you ask them what makes them so charming, they say : 'It is because we are better educated than your girls and—and we are more sensible in regard to men. We have good times all round but we aren't taught to regard every man as a possible husband. Nor is he expected to marry the first girl he calls on regularly ! ' "

Which reminds me of certain rural districts in Canada where, when a young man calls on a girl, her parents are expected to go and read the family Bible in the kitchen until the visit terminates. If the visit is unduly prolonged, the patient mother arms herself with a rolling-pin, or any other handy weapon, and the caller hurriedly departs.

Now, I expect to be laughed at for making such a statement, but directly I entered Stuart Cumberland's presence I felt conscious of an influence which I cannot explain. It began in my right foot and slowly crept upward. Perhaps it was an electric shock ; perhaps it was not ; I did not know what it was and resigned myself to it and we talked of many things. He has done a good deal of journalistic work and was much astonished to receive a cheque from *Truth*, made payable to " Sampson Walker, Esq." Thinking there must be some mistake, he went down to Mr. Voules, who said : " All right ; your name appears as Sampson Walker on the books." The regular outside contributors to *Truth* were all Walkers. Thus, Mr. Augustus Moore was " Hookey Walker," Mr. Sala " Street Walker," and so on.

George Augustus Sala, who wore a fresh white waistcoat every day of his life, would write about any given subject at a moment's notice. A friend of Sala's once made a bet that the great journalist could write a *Daily Telegraph* article without any preparation. Sala consented to be locked up in a room for two hours. Tea was the subject chosen. At the end of the two hours Sala had visited all the tea-shops in every great capital of Europe.

But I have forgotten Mr. Stuart Cumberland. The joke about it was that he thought I had been trying to mesmerise him.

How shall I tell of Eliza Lynn Linton, that dearest of friends and deadliest of enemies, the woman who would flay you alive in print if you quarrelled with her, and spend her last penny to help you when you needed help? As she once told me: "Intellectually there is no person harder, sharper, more bitter than myself. I mean, of course, in my intellectual presentation of things; and I do not hesitate in saying what I say. I would cheerfully be pilloried in defence of what I believe to be true. It never occurs to me that anything I write can hurt any individual. I say into space just what I think of abstract things. But my *morale* is different. There I am as a bit of wax or butter, and people whom I love can do anything they like with me."

I often went to her at Queen Anne's Mansions, where she dwelt in a flat somewhere near the skyline. We had to take two lifts to reach it and Jerome once asked the lift-boy what would happen to Mrs. Lynn Linton if a fire broke out. Now, our friend was very stout. "All she's got to do," said the lift-boy, "is to ketch 'old of a rope and swing herself out of the winder."

I first met her at a reception given on the opening night

of *Black and White*. We had looked at the machinery (some of us left fragments of swallow-tails in it), we had inspected the engravers as they sat with shades on their foreheads and a bright light shining through a glass ball on to their work, and, finally, after studying everything that was to be seen in types and mechanical appliances, began to glance at the stream of people ascending and descending the narrow staircases whilst the throbbing of the mighty engines made a subdued background of sound to the hum of conversation. Seated in one corner of the refreshment-room was a somewhat elderly woman of medium height, with silvery hair and blue eyes. She was accompanied by a young friend and chatted with Jerome. "That Mrs. Lynn Linton!" I said in astonishment to my informant. "Why, some wretched man the other day said she was harder than steel. It's an atrocious libel. One can't look at her without feeling her benevolence." Little did I know how soon I was to find my instinct correct.

"She's great," said my friend, producing a letter from his pocket. "Look at this letter she wrote me the other day when I wanted to know if she would let me interview her:

"MY DEAR SIR,

"I find 'no' the hardest word in the language, but it must be so this time. I have been interviewed and photographed so often, that I cannot consent to any other experiment of one kind or the other. It takes up my time, it humiliates me by its appearance of vanity and egotism, it wounds my sense of rightness by its necessarily imperfect and fragmentary presentation. I hate the whole thing—the whole system—and have only given my consent, out of kindness and consideration to those who have asked me.

"Now, do you ask me to do something else for you that I can do, and I will, but not this.

"Very faithfully yours,

"E. LYNN LINTON."

Everyone thronged to her Saturdays. Beatrice Harraden, who wrote what a Frenchman called "Sheep that Pass in the

Night," and William Watson were her most frequent visitors in that lovely room in grey-green, with Persian carpets and grey-green tapestry hangings. On one side of it was a magnificent copy of the Elgin Marbles. A little beneath the Elgin Marbles, upon the top of the bookcase, stood a filigree Cinque Cento basket presented to Mrs. Lynn Linton by Walter Savage Landor. On entering that room, one felt it was possible by dint of living among inanimate things, purely, classically beautiful in themselves, that some of their beauty might be unconsciously absorbed by us and reproduced in our daily lives and works.

Mrs. Lynn Linton was an adopted daughter of Walter Savage Landor, who

> "Strove with none, for none was worth my strife."

He addressed to her one of the most beautiful of his sonnets, although, unlike him, she strove with many and did not disdain the meanest antagonist. But it was the intellect which strove and not the woman. "I'm always so much better in attacking, my dear, than in defending," she once assured me. It was very refreshing to hear her detestation of humbug and sentimentality. The last time I saw her she presented me with a beautiful tea-tray and said: "Always do the best that is in you and never split your infinitives."

G. R. Sims talked so much of his liver in *Mustard and Cress* about this time, that an irate reader remonstrated with him. He offered a guinea to anyone who could find the word "liver" in *Mustard and Cress* for the next six months. A reader claimed the guinea the following week on the ground that Sims had written about "a *liver*yed varlet." Split infinitives are just as hard to avoid as livers. George Bernard Shaw is rather fond of split infinitives, and

once, to prove that they did not matter, wrote a letter full of them.

Some time after Mrs. Lynn Linton's death, I was at a dinner where a woman writer, who has several times been parodied in *Punch* and whose prevailing idea in a novel was to make an old or a middle-aged woman fall in love with a young man, said that she had never spoken before in public, but in a few faint, feeble, faltering utterances she would tell us of her early literary experiences. She had gone to a dinner at which Mrs. Lynn Linton presided and sat

'Remote, unfriended, melancholy, slow,"

in a corner. On looking up, she saw Mrs. Lynn Linton's benevolent eyes fixed upon her and felt better. As a consequence of the casual glance from those " benevolent eyes," whenever she was near Mrs. Lynn Linton's grave, she laid a red, red rose upon it . . . and so on *ad nauseam*. If my dear friend could only have heard her, she would promptly have cancelled that glance. " Pure heart and lofty soul," Landor called Mrs. Lynn Linton, and therein showed himself more discriminating than many who had writhed under her caustic satire.

Another interesting woman writer, although of a far different calibre, was John Strange Winter (Mrs. Arthur Stannard) the author of " Bootles' Baby," a book which set the fashion in military stories for many years. One of Ruskin's lectures was the foundation-stone of her success, and when her popularity was assured she wrote to tell him so and sent him " Mignon's Secret " and " That Imp." Curiously enough, at the same time Ruskin was forwarding those two books to Mrs. Arthur Severn. He wrote in reply to Mrs. Stannard :

"Of all pretty coincidences that ever happened to me this of your writing and sending me your books at the moment I was writing to my Joanie that yours were the only books I now cared to read, is quite the prettiest, and it makes me feel as if things were going to come right again for me for a while. And the knowledge that I have been helpful to you, as you tell me, is daintily good for me at a time when I am extremely displeased with everything I have tried to do; all the same, although the lesson was a good one, the real goodness was in the pupil, for I have given it to thousands without its being of the least use to them. And the essential quality of your work is of course its own. . . . I had not the least thought of your being a woman—I ought to have had—for really women do everything now that's best, and they know more about soldiers than soldiers know of themselves. But it had never come into my head, and I'm a little sorry that the good soldier I had fancied is lost to me, for I have many delightful women friends, but no cavalry officers, and I am ever

"Your grateful

"J. Ruskin."

Mrs. Stannard was very methodical and once gave me an extract from her Record Book, in which she kept a diary of all work done:

1888. 722 pages, 4 pages to 1,000 words.
1889. 755 pages, ,, ,, ,, ,,
1890. 780 pages, ,, ,, ,, ,,

A much smaller output than many workers can show nowadays; but her works, though many, were very short. The only time I ever saw her ruffled was when her last baby was born, and a flippant paragrapher said that "Mrs. Stannard's latest publication consists of an edition of one bound in flannel." "What else could you bind it in? Did he expect it to be twins bound in morocco?" she indignantly asked me.

To come down to more recent women novelists, that delightful hostess and charming writer, the life and soul of the Women Writers' Club, Mrs. Baillie Reynolds, was talking to me the other day about "the lit'ry life" and, like Oliver Twist, I asked for more. "You know more about it than I

do," she said. "Such a question coming from you makes me feel just like the unlucky heroine of a story of my youth. There were two sisters, Annie and Mary, Annie being lively and Mary very silent. One day, at a large dinner party, Annie was entertaining the company, when her mother leaned forward and said impressively: 'That is enough, my dear Annie. Dear Mary will now talk a little.' You may imagine the effect upon dear Mary." But that was sheer modesty, for she is one of the most delightful talkers I have ever met.

Then we got on to the question of whether writing, from a woman's point of view, is not a great sacrifice. She said that of course it was. The man who writes does it as his profession, and for the rest of his time expects to be at leisure. The woman who writes does it when she can; and has to do the whole of her usual feminine duties—housekeeping, needlework, social duties, and care of children—in her spare time. This is a point of view which, as every woman recognises, interests nobody but herself. She has to spend all her life in the hopeless endeavour to square the circle; and the result, of course is that both her work and her domestic life suffer—each being less complete than it might be. This state of things is, naturally, not so flagrant when the woman writer is unmarried, although it is often a case of losing on the swings what you gain on the roundabouts: for an unmarried woman is at a disadvantage in her knowledge of life.

Jane Austen was unmarried; but then she was a genius and she herself confessed that her range of experience was narrow. "Wuthering Heights" and "Evelina" were written by unmarried women. But it was Mrs. Gaskell who gave us "Cranford" and Mrs. Browning who produced "Aurora Leigh."

The evidence on the subject, however, is quite conflicting. For example, Mr. de Vere Stacpoole's work has gained so enormously since his marriage that one can hardly believe the same man wrote his earlier works. On the other hand, I think it is true that Kipling's finest work was written before marriage.

Mrs. Sidgwick, Mrs. Perrin, Mrs. Croker, Mrs. Belloc Lowndes have done all their good work in the married state. Miss Ellen Thorneycroft Fowler, on the other hand, did hers before marriage. The truth is that the status of woman is in such a condition of flux just now that one must reserve judgment. Not merely are they still handling their new liberties somewhat uncertainly—they are also in the grip of a new condition of social order. Twenty years ago it was still possible for a woman to have good servants to run her house for her. Now that this epoch seems to be coming to an end perhaps the woman writer (married) will pass with it. If a woman has to prepare all the food for her male household, as well as iron and get up their dress-shirts, something will have to go. Will it be boiled shirts or her bread-winning capacity? In a few years all town dwellers will settle down into service flats and adjust themselves to the novel conditions. Just now, the outlook for women writers is vague. Personally, I think, with their superhuman endurance and power of adaptability, women will continue to produce just as good work as in the days of old.

And now I am going to say something about a very striking personality. I have told of certain women writers in haphazard fashion, and am reserving Miss Marie Corelli for the ending of this chapter because her individuality is the most striking of all. At one time she and I were firm friends and she did her best to stimulate my flagging ambition by insisting that

I ought to write a book. Then came a slight misunderstanding which Time happily cleared away, and our old amicable relations took a fresh lease of life.

I suppose that Miss Corelli is the best-abused by a certain clique of all the prominent women writers of the day; but her striking individuality, her courage and wonderful knack of penetrating the joints of her opponents' armour with a few deft strokes, always commanded my intense admiration. There is no doubt that her success has had a great deal to do with the attacks on her. Where she sold by the thousand, most of us sold by the half-dozen, and it is not in human nature to see anyone succeed where we ourselves fail, without trying to justify our own failures at the expense of our rival. From the appearance of her first book, "A Romance of Two Worlds," she has always commanded a huge public which has followed her with unshaken faithfulness. She herself declares that she has had few literary vicissitudes, and therein she has been singularly fortunate, for most authors seldom have anything else. She attributes her good fortune to the fact that she has always tried to write straight from her own heart to the hearts of others, regardless of opinions and indifferent to the result. And when the critics sternly told her that she ought not to write in that way, she pluckily defied them and ordered her publishers not to send them any more books for review. But they reviewed her all the same. "We met," once said an eminent traveller, "a herd of wild asses. How they viewed and reviewed us!" That I fancy is Miss Corelli's attitude toward criticism, and I am the more unprejudiced because she once flagellated me in public (she is an admirable speaker) with an acumen which made me feel very small indeed. Now one can look back and forget it, although I was very unhappy at the time. Our

misunderstanding was not really my fault and yet it seemed cowardly to attempt to explain it away, so I had to seek refuge in : " What a noble thing it is to suffer and be strong."

Miss Corelli was a frequent visitor to our " Idler " teas, and came in radiantly one afternoon with a jewelled bangle on her arm, the gift of an admiring Rajah. Sir Arthur Conan Doyle was in a corner endeavouring to ward off the flattering compliments of an old lady who had mistaken one of Seton Merriman's books for his. She said it was a very fine book and was much surprised when he cordially agreed with her. Half a dozen other literary ladies were present and cast envious glances at the bangle. Barr came angrily to me and demanded to know what I meant by introducing a youngster in the office to his wife. " You told me he was Kipling's nephew," I explained. " Well, I must have dreamt it," said Barr. " He's nothing of the sort. I don't believe Kipling ever had a nephew."

Miss Corelli was unswerving in her devotion to her adopted father's son by his first marriage, Eric Mackay, author of " Love Letters of a Violinist." He was no blood relation, and had already lived half his life in Italy, a married man with one son, before stress of poverty and circumstance induced him to try England and his father's help to save him from going under. He was over forty when he met his father's adopted daughter, Marie Corelli, for the first time, and she was barely fourteen. She set herself energetically to work to redeem his fortunes, chiefly for his father's sake, whom she adored as the only parent she had ever known, and sold a little stock of jewels to publish his " Love Letters of a Violinist." He considered himself a great poet ; whereas, although he had a very pretty fancy, he was not a great poet, and it required all Miss Corelli's tact and energy to rescue him from

unpleasant situations which his own vanity brought upon him. She was very good to him and furthered his interests in every possible way. I fear that he was not sufficiently grateful to her. Where a dozen people heard of him, a thousand heard of her, but he was rather inclined to reverse the figures. Once he sent Swinburne a birthday ode and Swinburne did not like it, so Eric Mackay met him on Putney Heath and wanted to know why. Swinburne's reply was brief and emphatic.

Last year I was staying in Warwick and Miss Corelli asked me to spend a Sunday afternoon with her at her charming old house in Stratford-on-Avon. She very kindly sent her luxurious car for me, and as we neared Stratford all the inhabitants of the wayside cottages who knew the car rushed out to look at her. When they saw that I was its only occupant, the children put out their tongues at me and the grown-ups said "Yah!" I was sorry for their disappointment, the more so as my unfriendly reception continued all the way to Stratford.

Someone told Miss Corelli that I was going to end my days in a Trappist monastery, and she wrote to me pointing out that it was rather an unnecessary thing to do. I agreed with her. Since then, nothing has disturbed the harmony of our relations, and I hope that nothing ever will.

A certain humorist friend of mine once allowed his sense of fun to run away with him in his jokes about Miss Corelli. He fell on evil days, and was dying of cancer. Miss Corelli heard of it and at once subscribed to a fund which was being raised on his behalf. Although I believe he repudiated the fund, he was very grateful to her for her magnanimity.

CHAPTER XXV

AN UNEXPECTED FRIEND

One of the charms of the literary life is the making of new friends in the most unlikely parts of the world, people of whom you have never even heard but who have chanced to read some little story of yours which interests them and makes them want to know you. It is a delightful thing in an author's experience to receive such letters, and I have many. Some of them are of so intimate a character that they cannot be printed; others are a healing balm to the author's tired spirit when, weary and depressed at having finished a book, he finds that he has parted from characters who were very real to him and that the world may not appreciate them. The characters for the next book have not yet materialised and the author is as empty as a cistern waiting to be refilled. Though this depression does not endure, it is very painful while it lasts.

I am going to do rather an unusual thing and give extracts from letters to me of an extraordinary man who for twenty years has been one of my most intimate friends, *and whom I have once met for about an hour.* These letters are so vivid, so refreshing, such a revelation of a striking personality that they are much better reading than mere fiction could ever be. Our friendship began after, in my capacity of "reader" at Pearson's, I accepted a wonderful little book written by him, a book which I sent to Rudyard Kipling

to read. It interested him so much that he very kindly recommended it to an American publisher. As a revelation of a striking individuality, I give these letters to the world, although of course I do not divulge my friend's identity:

I

Your letter of the 26th is awfully kind. It was a thoughtful action and a good turn and I'll not forget it. It took some of my emotions by the scruff of the neck and shook them as they have not been shaken for a long time. I'll not forget I have knocked about the whole wide world pretty well ever since I was a kid, and I haven't any surface softness left, but I just loved you when I got that letter: there was something so cup-of-cold-water to a disciple in the name of a disciple about it: I was just starving for a tiny bit of recognition from somebody—somebody that knew.

You may put me down right away as a man with very few illusions about himself. I shan't ever be popular—a people's writer. But I do trust with patience and judgment and tact to please some day an influential few people—a red-blooded, fine-fibred, swift elect who have read a bit and thought a bit and experienced or divined a good bit. I'll never be able to appeal to the great English middle-class as lots of far abler fellows than I can do. What I mean is that I'm not a competitor for mere popularity and that if I can bring the fine smile or the sudden chuckle occasionally to a face that is not a doll's head or jowl, I shall have touched the spot I hope to touch.

You see, I don't know anything of contemporary English literature—or very little. I have lived most of my life in California and Australia, working infamously hard—teacher,

gold mine speculator and prospector, newspaper proprietor—all in a small way, though I have made (and mostly dropped again) some tidy sums of money. I have here and there picked up a medical education (I studied a season in Paris) and a diploma or two. I am here (in this village) in charge of my practice. This makes me independent in a small but sufficient way. But, first and last, I am a writer all the same. I have no finished work ready just yet, but have, however, about a dozen things more or less in progress. And I have made arrangements this summer by which I shall have a good deal of leisure to work at writing—perhaps four to six hours a day. So that, in sum, I hope to be able to trouble you some day for an opinion and perhaps a little help in placing a 200,000 words novel—California, New Mexico, or North Australia. I thank you for offering to help me in this way.

II

Woe is me. My book still welters. But out of chaos bits of a respectable creation hump themselves insistently. Soon, I hope, some rare old fragments of a new world will be on the job. It's all going to happen on a little coast town on the shores of the Infernal Gulf (Carpentaria). Here clash three races in deadly strife (sounds Surrey-side, that sentence does)—three races in deadly strife—two for mastery, and one for existence. In no part of Australia are the blacks less amenable to civilisation, more difficult to exterminate. In no part of Australia are the Chinese more numerous and more assertive, God help 'em. In no part of Australia are the whites fewer and more redoubtable.

A big job—some very pretty loving and fighting! If I

can only win through it. And I'll do that if my guardian devil doesn't desert me.

Some other time I'll tell you about Bancroft and Marriott and Vallejo and Cerrutti and my other old 'Frisco associates: time and death have just released me from all bonds of reserve and secrecy concerning those days. There's a big novel to write about all that, and little I shall have to invent either; and you'll say so when you know. Two of our crowd were pistolled in those years; one committed suicide (laudanum plus pistol—he was a thorough-going chap); and one married the other woman and drank himself to death. But I'll say this for them, there wasn't an uninteresting man in the whole "push"; and most of them at one time or other made a little mint of money. A corrupt city government, and a devil's own press and a gang of politicians and press boys whose only virtue was courage. Well, the devil was abroad in those days, and the days were too short for his work.

I wonder what Stevenson thinks of it all now, where he is, where he sees, where he knows so much more than he did down here, if half that we hope be true. It was no mean God made Stevenson; and with any sort of a decent God, Stevenson's bound to have the best kind of a show. This is my short and simple creed: I live encouraged by it, and hope to die comforted by it. Whoever has loved a child, I think, will hardly die fearing his Father in heaven.

But the fact is, I am a beast—the peculiarly irritating sort of beast that is always falling between the two schools of the *Bien* and the *Mieux*. Says I to myself: "I am dull to-day, idiotic, a damphool"—and so on, abusing myself shameful—"but to-morrow, when I shall be brisker and brighter, I'll write such a nice, radiant hull-team-and-dog-under-the-waggon letter as'll make your hair curl." And thus and so on have

I dawdled and dallied and canoodled with Procrastination and played with the hair of Manana in the shade. She's an old pal of mine, the slut. And when once she gets you good, you never get over it.

Never mind: there's a budding morrow in midnight (as some fool says somewhere), and I'll wake up presently. It's the same with everything I do—alternations of idiotic idleness and furious industry. And I feel that—to-morrow—or next day . . . You wait and see.

III

I am in a piggish frame of mind to-night, fretful as the poet's porcupine, amiable as a rogue elephant. And all my own fault—temperamental lack of patience also. My time and energy are frittered away over so many trifles, by amiable fool visitors whom I could often souse in hell and watch sizzle with all the pleasure in life. They *will* drop in on a hard-working chap "to cheer him up, to liven him up, to knock the cobwebs off him." And because I know them to be paved, like hell, with good intentions, or at worst to be of the to-be-forgiven-for-they-know-not-what-they-do class (I forgive them nevertheless) the thing is hard to be borne and exhausting. Doubly exhausting when you come to reckon it up: for, first of all, you strain your liver contorting yourself out of your natural impulse to kill your visitor on the spot and bury him in quicklime under the floor: and, secondly, when for hygienic and other reasons you decide to spare him, he generally in the long run winds you round to his own mood of idiotic loafing—out of which, when he at last departs, you have again to wrench yourself into the working mood—about

which time, as like as not, the devil sends you another visitant, or perhaps a patient. Gad, I tell you, it's a hard life, this of mine, for a chap about a year behind time with a still rather nebulous book. Shade of our army in Flanders, you should hear me easing myself of my feelings sometimes! The simple folk of my household stop their ears and deprecate, as they assure me, the lightning of heaven.

The time of your departure for Four Corners draweth nigh, and I would fain send you off with a cheerful word or two, though I haven't lutes of amber nor words to match at present. That you be happy and return refreshed in soul and body is the least I pray for. If the Fates be but moderately kind, you are bound to see many new things (to build new mansions of the imagination on) and also to re-see many old things in the light of eyes and an insight more highly trained than ever. What joys, sorrows, achievements, renunciations,have you not known since last you saw the maple and smelt the pine of the Land of Four Corners! In Somebody's grave there, perhaps, you have buried a bit of your youth. Look at the grave as you pass. There may be flowers on it now, or at least a wind in the grass with something to say to you. I hope, further, that you won't do anything rash about Minnehaha out there. You are at liberty to love Minnehaha a little, decorously, of course, and then—well, in short, hang it! I'll put it in my own way: you are to love and ride away again, not on any account to die of love and have Canadian worms a-eating of you.

No, there's no cure for sea-sickness, and if there were I should not recommend it to you. I have, you know, used the sea for years, steamships and sailing-ships, and I've seen every variety of fool try every variety of stupefying and stomach-paralysing drug to dodge sea-sickness. No use.

Besides, why should one try to dodge it ? Sea-sickness is to the average overfed, under-exercised son of civilisation (that's you or me) a valuable hygienic detergent revulsive. Your liver will be shaken like a rag in a hurricane, but will arise up afterward like a giant refreshed, snorting for corn and wine *et circense* in general. Seriously, there is but one sane thing to do about sea-sickness, *viz.*, lie literally down to it, keep to your berth till you have had it and got it over. It will be less violent thus and the sooner done with. And you can read with one eye, as it were, and be sick with the other. And now I wish you God speed, a pleasant and fruitful voyage, a safe and triumphant return.

IV

Perhaps you'll be glad to see this in the midst of your wanderings. I have felt like that myself in the far places of the earth—glad to see the fist of the home dweller and hear his written patter. Gives a sort of flavour of contrast to accentuate the tang of the new environment.

I guess you to be pretty keenly and variously happy by now. What with novelty and what with reminiscence, lost chords keenly vibrating and new chords on the jump, your heart will be making you lots of music over there.

You will have known now for a long spell what oculists term the relaxation of accommodation of the eye. Your eyes, no longer on the perpetual strain, and alert of the short focus of civilisation, ride easy in their sockets as a bushman in his saddle, without effort, strain, or tension. The upper lid and the lower no longer grip and push back. A cap of lead seems lifted off the sight. And one no longer sees

merely for the need of seeing, but also for the pleasure of it.

Your outline of a soul blanched in a Trappist cell, thwarted in the name of God, of that God which is the word, opens immense possibilities of fascinating development. One should thus tend to become either a ruminating ox, an unearthly mystic, or a gagged devil. I know which I should become. But possibly your line, for literary purposes, will be to take your mushroom with streaks of fire in him (semi- or dimly brained and blooded) suddenly out of his cellar, shove him blinking into the sun, and grow him rapidly under its influences (good and bad) into a creature a little ridiculous, somewhat a cause of mirth, but subjectively pathetic and finally a more or less tragical and hopeless finish, or at best a merely hysterical and supersensual George-Moore-sort-of-*pis-aller*-solution. That is how at this moment I see the thing, but morning might bring me better counsel, or you may have caught (at first hand, from study and observation of the boy himself) some better way out. But your "Shutters of Silence" seems to my ear, as a first impression, to clash down upon hope. If, however, you have an angel to roll away the stone from the tomb, so to say, then so much the better for all concerned.

I know you are working hard and laying up store for yourself in heaven, yea, and I trust upon earth, too. I have the utmost respect for the man whom no comparative neglect can enervate, for the man who works the harder for every stumbling-block Destiny casts in his way, who doesn't care a damn (I speak after the manner of men) even for Destiny, who may be broken by Destiny but will not be bent. That is the sort of man I love, for it is the sort of man I respect: and I cannot abide a poor creature!

V

Kipling's "Kim" is a great book. I hope and trust and am inclined to believe that he nothing values the yawp of the occasional creatures who snap at the heels of his prosperity. The man who says Kipling is not a "sommite" of literature and a devil of a genius is a liar and an ass. Man, when K. lets himself go properly the glory of his nostrils and the virility of his neighings are terrible, a revelation of the resources of God in creation that keeps me from turning atheist.

I had already heard, or dreamed, that you were in Brittany. And I have two or three times thought of you there and been glad you were breathing a more romantic air than that of Fleet Street. London has been slowly murdering you these many years. A man's inspiration cannot feed itself on fog and respectability. There's a chap called Merriman, and there's Pemberton, and there's the Captain Kettle man, and they seem to scoop an immense public largely because they scour the earth for new scenery for their novels. Mind you, I do not speak disrespectfully of their work considered only from the point of view of human insight and good craftsmanship; but what an addition to these essentials are fresh costumes and a new atmosphere—tongues, faces, and horizons constantly changing.

And now you are going to the States. I reckon matters up like this. There are dozens of writing men "on the town" who write practically irreproachable English, who can say the thing they have to say exceedingly well, nay, brilliantly. But "God's mercy strike 'em gentle," something more is needed to make the jaded nerves of the town tingle—I mean, some striking novelty in subject and in setting, matter and milieu. Man, this century is born jaded, born

very tired of the merely correct and artistic: the correct and the artistic the public must indeed have (at least the public that cares for you and that you care for) but you must be continually changing your landscapes and your models and your schemes of colour. Something like that is what I mean to say. Every artist, *qua* artist, has a bit of God in him—the Great Artist—and He quick-changed His figures and His scenery on the biggest kind of scale when dashing off this Universe. And He just bust his best records in America.

Again, a nerve can give no greater reaction than its action. England must already have given you pretty well all the sensations your organisation can savour with any keenness: you must have worlds of new thrills waiting for you in America. Go, then, favoured of the gods. Vibrate, *frissonez*, and pass on to us some tingle of it all, something to quicken half-dead hearts and quite torpid intelligences.

Avoid politics, moralities, respectabilities, and chewed-out things in general; and get insatiable teeth into raw acrid human nature—and bring home as much as you can bite off—"Un jet de bave rouge au bout de chaque dent."

VI

I have noticed with satisfaction that "The Shutters" are (is, of course) being pushed and advertised in America, in that thoroughgoing way for which the Americans hold the sole patent. If your English publishers were half as pushful, your returns of sales would boom and soar. Business and literature are not to be confounded; but the man who neglects his business will not long live to produce literature. Personally, I like to see a man do whatever he has to do with all his might—whether it be to sell pills or sell literature.

The " gent " who is too superior to hustle in his own business affairs had best keep clean out of all matters into which business enters. When a fellow has the work of his talent or genius to sell, he owes it to his Maker, Who entrusted him with the said talent—with implicit orders to make the most of it—to wring the last cent out of it. If you have anything to *give* a man, give it to him and there'll be a good taste in both your mouths; but to let a man *do* you is a loathly thing. And short of doing you (which I do not suggest) your antiquated London publishers may quite as effectively starve you by neglecting or ineffectively pursuing your potential business interests. Clumsily and hurriedly worded all this, but you will understand the truth of it.

If my finical and fretful delays in working hinder me from turning out enough work to make much impression on a world very much engaged with other things, if I never live to make my few friends—in short, if I can never manage to be a credit to my friends, I will try always to be remembered by them as at least a very grateful and appreciative poor devil. . . . I am a very poisonous reptile to those I dislike, and indeed I sometimes hurt those I love, the snapping habits of an otherwise faithful dog. In short, for I feel myself drivelling, I mean well to those who have claims on my affection but am often unhappy in my manner of showing my affection, or of not showing it. I am often undexterous in the little amenities that go so far to grease the wheels of living. But then—as now—I always come suddenly to see my sin with intolerable vividness and contrition—sort of cut and come again at sin and at repentance, like lots of great men and almost all great women.

I have barely twenty consecutive uninterrupted minutes for reading or writing. A score of times has this letter been

interrupted. But never for an instant do I give up my purposes—my books of the future—if it be but a future of dreams. As in all the melodramas, I assure you the day *will* come. Meantime, don't ask me any questions—don't rowel me with questions!

Deuced little in all this to help you, I'm afraid. But look at it in this way: I want you to know that I often think of you; often in my way pray for your continuous success—and that I like to chat with you, partly to prove my poor friendship, and partly to please myself as feigning still to belong in some fashion to that world of letters to which you belong—even if my fashion be merely the clinging on to your skirts.

. . . . . .

There are dozens of other letters, but these suffice to show the manner of man who wrote them. Some day we shall meet again and spend another happy hour together.[1]

[1] My friend died soon after the above words were written.

CHAPTER XXVI

OLLA PODRIDA

During the war the times were out of joint. Some authors also became disjointed, especially when they lived, as I did, within the range of falling Hun bombs. When, driven back from London, a bombing machine fled over Highgate and saluted me with all its undischarged bombs (I was in the middle of a book) it proved to be a little disconcerting. I endeavoured to disregard the bombs and, mindful of Trollope's old man, "It's dogged as does it," worked doggedly on. My cat, on the other hand, treated bombs with lofty indifference and seemed to imagine that they were fireworks let off in his honour. One night when the cat and I were alone in my "den," the cook, a very nervous, hysterical woman, was incoherently saying her prayers in the kitchen. She suddenly came back from heavenly to earthly comfort and tearfully besought me to hold her hand and sit with her beneath the safe shelter of the kitchen stairs until the danger passed. Nothing loth to enjoy himself, the black cat accompanied us to that happy haven. We placed two chairs beneath our refuge and a lighted candle on the flagged stones, and the cat, taking the centre of the stage by the lighted candle, urbanely began to wash himself. Every time a bomb fell, the cook screamed out: "Oh, my! Oh-h, my-y!! Oh-h-h, my-y-y!" and bumped her head against the top of the stairs. In the middle

of one prolonged anguished "Oh-h-h-h my-y-y-y!" she suddenly caught sight of the cat placidly licking himself with minute particularity and shrieked out: "Look at that in-u-man cat!" The cat sneered at her and contentedly listened to the crash of another bomb.

Although the bombing had not greatly interfered with my literary output, I had a vague idea that I was feeling the strain of it and, when the strain was removed by the ending of the war, suddenly went to pieces. Dozens of other writing men suffered in the same way and could not understand it until someone explained that our "sub-conscious systems" had been suffering unknown to our "conscious selves." In six months, after a delightful holiday in Holland with my friend Dr. Morgan de Groot, "Richard was himself again," himself with a difference. It was a different world to which I returned. The old one had gone for ever. Its atmosphere was different, everything was different, everyone was different. There was a restlessness about people, an inclination to jump when a door banged suddenly or a boy shouted in the street below. Harmless newspaper men appeared at the Whitefriars in smart uniforms. Their old placidity had vanished, and they ordered the Club waiter about with the air of martinets longing for an excuse to court-martial him. Their thoughts were still on military matters and Fleet Street interested them no more. Gradually, however, as their uniforms were called in, they became their former selves, shrunken, stooping images of the old days. Sometimes I saw them rubbing their eyes as if they had just awakened from a horrible dream. The Death Angel had silently folded his hovering wings and still they could scarcely believe it.

After all, it was a very natural state of feeling. If you have said good-bye to wife and child and know that the

chances are heavily against your ever returning to them, that you may enter a trench and five minutes later "go to your Gawd like a soldier," it has to be something very big indeed which, should you escape the Death Angel, will interest you in the future. Some men, scarred, maimed, and mutilated, have escaped the Death Angel, and the fragments that are left of them endeavour to take up the old tasks in a matter-of-fact way which is very painful to witness because it so ill conceals all that they suffer and must suffer for the rest of their honourable days. Those who have come back from the war prepared to write about their experiences find that the nation is tired of their experiences, that it wants to forget all that they and it have suffered, to clear up the turmoil of the present and readjust itself for the future, that future the nature of which no man can foretell.

And so we began again as if little had happened. At one of our Whitefriars' dinners, my old friend Richard Whiteing was struggling to get into his overcoat. "Thus," said I, helping him, "thus do I minister to real greatness." "Damn your impudence," said he.

At another time I met a military-looking novelist who had just returned from Salonica. "I've seen a lot of cheap editions of your books all over the place," he said, after we had exchanged fraternal greetings, then added meditatively: "They'll read any d——d thing out there."

Then one of our White Frairs fell on evil days and, "broken by fortune," retired to that comfortable haven, the Charterhouse. I went to see him there and found it a wonderful place, full of associations of Thackeray, who had been one of its pupils. In one house was a tablet setting forth that inside was the room of a friend of Thackeray's whom he used to visit when writing "The Newcomes." My

friend's room was large and comfortable, with an enormous four-poster bed surrounded by mediæval curtains. In the mornings a kind of nurse-housemaid came along, did up the room, lit the fire, and laid the breakfast-table. He had to attend chapel once a day and if he were not "on time" at dinner the big dining-room doors were closed against him. He wore a college gown and "mortar-board" when inside the Charterhouse. If he came out for a stroll, he discarded them. There was a doctor resident who looked after him if he were ill, and a holiday for him in the summer when the Charterhouse rooms were done up. In short, the whole thing was very like an ordinary college, rations included. All one had to do was to live as long as possible, and then exit *à la* Colonel Newcome:

"At the usual evening hour the chapel bell began to toll, and Thomas Newcome's hands outside the bed feebly beat time. And just as the last bell struck, a peculiar sweet smile shone over his face, and he lifted up his head a little, and quickly said 'Adsum!' and fell back. It was the word we used at school when names were called; and he, whose heart was as that of a little child, had answered to his name, and stood in the presence of The Master."

The only drawback to this otherwise engaging retreat was, as Odell the actor once explained to me: "Unless you get a special permit, you are expected to be in by eleven —just when my evening begins."

And now, as Lady Godiva said on returning from her memorable visit to Coventry, "Thank God, I am coming to my close." Personally, I shall be more pleased than any reader can be, for the eternal "I-I-I" inevitable to the telling of personal experiences is very trying to a man who would fain be thought modest. For that reason, with one solitary exception, I have not alluded to my own books. I set out

with the idea of telling of one's experiences in becoming a novelist—experiences such as could be compressed in a reasonable space—and have said little or nothing about many of my colleagues with whom I am on terms of intimacy. To one who, to put it mildly, is no longer in the first bloom of youth, it would be inexpressibly painful to discover that those friends have become alienated by some thoughtless word uttered for the sake of a good story. At the same time, I must confess that some of the stories I have told are as nothing to some of the stories, did discretion permit, that I could tell.

The main object of this book is to show something of the difficulties of literary aspirants and the formative process they must undergo at the hands of the world before they become able either to amuse or to instruct it. A man must have certain qualities to succeed as a novelist, and he is helped or hindered by chance and environment in the development of those qualities. Some men succeed with a very short apprenticeship; they approach to genius. Hard work will do much for many men, surroundings will do more. But neither can take the place of genius. Fortunately for the world, many of us are not geniuses. I say fortunately, because if every writer were a genius the strain to keep pace with him would dismember the world.

It is a melancholy thing to survive your friends, the men who have fought shoulder to shoulder with you in your struggle to get a hearing; and I have lost many. Barr, Alden, Tommy Gallon, Bennett Coll, and a dozen others have all gone. Only this afternoon I was looking through old letters and at old photographs, and the sight of them did not make for happiness, our being's end and aim. There was one letter from Tommy Gallon in his beautifully clear,

delicate handwriting: "We have just had a disaster. A new maid has temporarily appeared on the scene. She comes from the country or some remote district in the East End. After dinner she removed the tray and went off with it. We heard an ominous 'Bumpetty, bumpetty-bump' on the kitchen stairs, a loud crash. Then there was silence punctuated by groans. Presently the door opened a little, she thrust her head through the aperture, and said, solemnly, simply, as one stating an indisputable fact: 'I ketched my 'eel.' That was all. 'I ketched my 'eel.' Then she went away to 'ketch' up the fragments of our best dinner-service."

When I was being interviewed the other day, the interviewer wanted to know what was "the proudest moment of my life," one of those silly questions to which one has to invent a profound answer. The most astonished moment of my life was when the Rev. R. J. Campbell, at the City Temple, preached a sermon in which he alluded to "The Shutters of Silence." As I have never, consciously that is, provided food for a sermon, I am tempted to give an extract from this one.

"I have been reading within the last few days what was to me a beautiful and a helpful, even a powerful, book. I really wonder why I did not read it before; I had it long ago. It was Mr. Burgin's story, 'The Shutters of Silence.' The author, one with whom I have an old familiar acquaintance, describes with wonderful sympathy and penetration an experience of this kind: a boy, separated from his home by the malignant purpose of one who should have treated him with love and kindness, finds himself at five years of age succoured by the inmates of a Trappist monastery in Canada. Until he is eighteen he knows no world but that, and when his father discovers him, he is brought forth to the world as you and I know it, the world of that everyday problem, dark trouble, and stormy experiences in which you men and women get your living in this great city. He plunges right into the midst of it, coming to the conclusion presently that, for the sake of his new-found mother and the woman whom he fain would have made his wife, he must go

back, he must die to them and to the rest of the world to save them from the disclosure of an evil secret. But he does not go.

"They seek him at the monastery gate and have to wait for him until the day he returns, as they suppose, to remain within the monastery for ever. When they interrogate him concerning himself he says: 'No, I am not going back.' Pardon me if I paraphrase his speech. In the emigrant ship, going over to the sweet home of his childhood, he saw men and women in sickness and in sin. He nursed the tired little ones, he soothed their sorrows and bound up the wounds of their fathers and mothers; he was their spiritual and their temporal saviour; he guided them in Christ's name to the new home they were to make and provide for the future, in which they were to see the temporal in the light eternal. 'No,' he said to those from whom he had fled. 'No, I am not going back. I know how to renounce the world without leaving it.'

"I think, though some of you in this church this morning are older than I am, you still may have that lesson to learn. We learn it with difficulty—the hardest of all lessons, perhaps. For we cannot renounce it in one great act as by fleeing to a monastery. You can renounce the world at one o'clock to-day by telling yourself that it has no rewards to offer; you will have no more of its blandishments and its deceits, you can see through them all. But that boy who came fresh into it could see that it was not the pure and simple world he had left. You can say it to-day, to-morrow too; our Lord may have to pray for you as He prayed for the leader of the apostles—'Simon, Simon, behold, Satan hath desired to have you that he may sift you as wheat: but I have prayed for you that your faith fail not.' To-day you made your vow, to-morrow you must keep it; to-day life is one act for God; to-morrow you must not live as if you had never done so. An open heart answers to the Saviour's prayer, 'Not that Thou shouldest take them out of the world, but that Thou shouldest keep them from that evil.' We escape it by saving it, by seeing it in the light of the eternal."

It was not until I read this extract that I realised my novel had a purpose, that I had unconsciously preached a sermon. The only other sermon I ever preached was once in Armenia when some native Christians insisted on my addressing them in their little church. The dragoman stuck me in front of an old washstand which served for a reading-desk, and I said that I would tell the congregation about a great and good English clergyman. Again my old friend "The Deserted Village" came to my aid, and the dragoman spun it out by slowly translating, with additions

of his own, each line after me. Unfortunately, when we reached

"And passing rich on forty pounds a year,"

the point altogether missed fire, because the dragoman turned the forty pounds into piastres (a piastre is worth about twopence farthing) and the congregation thought that I was alluding to some rich prelate—a bishop at least—of the Anglican Church, and respected him accordingly.

There is a book which began with, "I, who am dead, write these words." It is not given to many of us to read our own obituary notices, but a few years ago it became a habit on the part of the Press to kill off people who were still very much alive. One morning *Hazell's Annual* came out with a statement that I had "gone West," and the butcher and baker and candlestick-maker, who had heard of it in some mysterious way, called to "settle their little accounts" with the corpse. In fact, they refused to believe me when I said I was alive, because the papers had declared that I was not. Although, as Mark Twain says, I considered the report "grossly exaggerated," I took no notice of it until I went to my club to lunch and the president of the club said to the waiter: "I don't think you need trouble to wait on Mr. Burgin; he's dead." Ninety-three obituary notices poured in, all very nice and flattering, with the exception of one which said: "Why all this fuss about a 'rising young author'? The late Mr. Burgin was fifty at least." Another notice, with which I cordially agreed, declared that "it was sad to see me cut off in my prime." The mistake arose because another man, who really was dead, had written "The House with the Green Shutters," and the writer mixed it up with "The Shutters of Silence." I was sorry for the other man, because I

had robbed the poor fellow of his obituary notices, but when everyone made the same jokes and started back in affected horror at the sight of me, I had to write and explain to the papers that, although I died a thousand deaths when I received my Press notices of a new book, I was still alive. This was the second time I had been taken for dead. An old schoolfellow of my dead brother met me one day and turned pale. "I thought you were dead," he faltered. "No; it was my poor brother who died." "I'm sorry," said he.

I have not been to Canada for eight years and regretfully wonder how old friends are getting on without me. There is a sublimity about the Rocky Mountains which "intrigues" me, and I want to see them again. I am heretic enough to think that Switzerland lacks the sublimity of the Rockies because you generally find a waiter on the summit of every peak. The scenery of the Rockies, too, is badly staged. Instead of a day of Bush, a day of prairie, and a day of mountains, you get an interminable array of Bush from Ottawa to Winnipeg, than an equally interminable vista of prairie with marvellous sunsets, prairie dogs and coyotes, and, later, the overwhelming grandeur of the Rockies until you reach Vancouver. In the Kicking Horse Pass, on the side of a sheer cliff, is the lifesize presentment of a kicking black mustang and its Indian rider, perfect in every detail. No human hand could ever have placed it there, and the freak is caused by an outcropping stratum of rock. As we climbed to the summit of the pass, an old traveller looked meditatively down on the swamp below. "In the beginning of things that's where a train went over; it's there still."

One of the most enjoyable trips I ever made was to Galicia, in the north-west of Spain. I was with a party of

International Journalists, among whom were the late James Baker, the indefatigable secretary who knew what we all wanted and always got it for us, Sir James Yoxall, Mr. and Mrs. Walter Jerrold, Mrs. Palmer, Mr. and Mrs. Adams (she is the equally well-known daughter of "Madge" of *Truth*), Lloyd-Evans, editor and Mayor of Warwick, and his accomplished daughter, now principal of the Furzedown L.C.C. Training College for teacher-students. We had a perfectly regal reception everywhere (Spanish hospitality is proverbial), and it was only on our return home that Walter Jerrold became regretful. "I know we're back in England again," he sorrowfully observed, "because I have to pay for my own lunch."

I brought home with me a huge box of Spanish pottery without mishap until I reached the foot of the hill leading to my home. Then the taxi-cab man let the box drop in the middle of the road with a loud crash and smashed two-thirds of its contents. He turned pale. "What was in it, sir?" "Plates, you idiot." "Thank God, sir," he piously ejaculated; "I thought it was whiskey."

At another time I went to Rome with some more journalists and we were fêted to death. The dinners generally began at nine. On one occasion I had the misfortune to sit immediately below the orator of the evening. He was a fluent and impassioned orator and I am bald. The spray from his lips descended on my bald head for twenty minutes and the next day I had a bad cold. Perhaps the most interesting of the festivities was a Royal Garden Party at the Quirinal Palace, where I was put in front of the others because my "pot-hat" was the shiniest. The ceremony of presentation was very simple. An official read out your name, you advanced, uncovered, shook hands with the King, and effaced

yourself more or less gracefully. Which reminds me of another party at Sir West Ridgeway's in the Isle of Man.

Sir Thomas Hall Caine had invited a large party of friends to stay with him at Greba Castle, and in his invitations expressly stipulated that we were not to trouble to bring the conventional habiliments with us, as there would be no necessity for them in exploring the island. So we did not. When we reached Sir West Ridgeway's one afternoon in ordinary tourist attire, we found to our sorrow that there was a "swell"—there is no other word for it—party of fashionable people assembled there, and we had to run the gauntlet of Guardsmen and society women. Sir Hall Caine wore his Irving hat; I had a tweed suit and a straw hat, and, as speedily as possible, hid behind a tree. Two elegantly-dressed women passed in front of my hiding-place and one of them said to the other: "What an interesting collection of strange animals! It's almost as good as the Zoo." During our visit we picnicked at a farmhouse, and one lady of the party, who evidently did not know much about cows, emerged from the cowshed with a wild shriek. "What's the matter?" we asked, crowding round her. "I—I went to stroke a cow," she gasped, "and it shook its head and growled at me."

Nowadays an author has to be prepared for everything at a moment's notice. The day before "the end of the world" I received the following telegram from the editor of a well-known journal: "Can you let me have before lunch to-morrow five hundred words sunny article from point of view of man who waits for the end of the world and is disappointed?"

Of course I could. As Huckleberry Finn says: "I done it"—within an hour of the receipt of the telegram.

With regard to the "technical evenings" of an author's life, I have had some delightful nights at the Women Writers' Club, although one's dinner was spoiled by the thought of the inevitable speech. G. K. Chesterton is a great favourite there and often opens a debate. They have a special chair for him from which he benignantly overflows. When people used to ride in hansoms I once saw him in one and said so to Robert Barr. He looked at me severely. "Do be more accurate in your statements. You saw part of Chesterton in the hansom." Of course there is the old story of the bus conductor who asked if any gentleman would give up his seat to oblige a lady. Whereupon Mr. Chesterton gallantly gave up his seat, and three ladies sat down in it.

At these debates, Mrs. Baillie Reynolds, Mrs. Alice Perrin and a host of other accomplished women writers generally speak, and they all speak well. The speeches of the women members are full of humour and, as a rule, much livelier than those of the visitors. The only unhappy time I ever spent there was when something was presented to a certain Duchess and the crowd was so great that I was forced into the fireplace and two pots of palms fell on my head.

The great charm about the Women Writers is that they are all workers, whereas at another women's club with literary pretensions there are occasional social butterflies who get someone else to write their books, and pose as literary characters on the strength of them. One woman I knew gave a poor boy five pounds to write up her travel notes, and after the book came out was much fêted. "Yes, it seems rough, but I was very glad of the five pounds," the boy said to me when he was invited to a dinner given in her honour. "Why don't you get up and return thanks for the authorship of

the book when the toast is proposed ? " I indignantly suggested ; "it would greatly enliven the evening." "All right," he said joyously, then shook his head. "Perhaps I'd better not. She might ask for the five pounds back again, and I've spent the money."

"Too muchee talkee-talkee," said the cannibal chief when the missionary tried to convert him and he converted the missionary—into food. These pages are open to the same objection. Just a word more, however, about writing novels.

All strong emotions should be simply expressed. As Jerome puts it in a nutshell : "In fiction when a hero is going to propose, instead of saying : 'Will you marry me, ducky ?' he begins with : 'Sweet, dost see yon star ?' and goes on for a page and a half in a similar strain until he reluctantly reaches the point. George Eliot knew the force of simplicity when Adam Bede says to Dinah Morris : 'Next to my God, I love you better than anything in the world.' Then he makes a long speech. Artemus Ward is more direct, for Betsy says : 'If you mean getting hitched I'm in.' "

Thackeray's men are truer to life than Dickens' men, because they have a natural mixture of good and evil. No man is good all the time any more than he is evil from the cradle to the grave. Every good man has a bad spot, and every bad man has a touch of good in him, although sometimes it is a little difficult to find.

So many heroes and heroines of fiction are unnatural because they are the Liebig of humanity boiled down to its essence.

Real life does not adhere to the unities which bind the novelist, for there are always such long waits between the

acts. The novelist plans the end of his story to suit himself and his readers. We cannot do this in real life.

. . . . . .

I do not think that I can decently add to these outpourings, though many things surge up in my memory. I set out on this "adventure perilous" to depict the experiences which go to the making of an author. If, during this formative process, any of my experiences prove of value to others who want to learn something about writing novels, they may possibly pick up a few hints from them. "A man of letters," says Colonel Newcome—

"A man of letters follows the noblest calling any man can pursue. I would rather be the author of a work of genius than be Governor-General of India. I admire genius. I salute it, wherever I meet it. I like my own profession better than any other in the world, but then it is because I am suited to it."

Most of us become authors through no fault of our own, but because we are suited to it. Writing is the one thing for which we gradually become fit, or fit ourselves for with more or less success. On the whole, in spite of its carking cares and anxieties, the author's is a fairly happy life. A good-natured writer makes many friends, but even good-natured ones cannot escape an occasional enemy. The only man I can recall as an enemy has a hand which irresistibly suggests the touch of cold boiled plaice, and it is no sin to quarrel with a man who has a hand like that. The tragedy of the author's life, however, is that just when he begins to think that he knows something about the world and can be of use to it, there comes the inevitable "fell arrest" and he has to leave it. What little he has learned during his wanderings on the face of the earth is swallowed up in the earth. His

favourite club sends a wreath with an inscription, half a dozen friends sorrowfully accompany him on his last journey as far as they can, and

> "The world goes round and round,
> And the sun sinks into the sea ;
> But whether he's over or under the ground,
> Oh, what does it matter to—— "

anybody ! If the "diseased" has "achieved the degradation of a popular success," a degradation to which most of us would willingly submit, the papers give him a paragraph or two culled from the recondite pages of *Who's Who.* A new star arises, and the dead man is left to his long rest—

> "Where the Rudyards cease from Kipling,
> And the Haggards ride no more."

A little girl friend of mine once decided to write a novel, and prudently collected subscriptions for it in advance. But she soon tired of it, and, after making the hero and the villain confront one another with drawn swords, wound up : "They agreed to fight it out. The End." I am still "fighting it out."

But "Avay vith melancholy," as the small boy said when the schoolmistress died, and he had a holiday.

"Master's always a bit of a pressimist," my old servant once declared to an awestruck butcher-boy. An optimist is a man who believes that everything unlikely to happen is certain to happen ; a pessimist is the man who lives with an optimist. I have lived with many optimists.

THE END

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